PLUS: Fred Kaplan on Peter Beinart

Washington MONTHLY

WHY CONSERVATIVES CAN'T GOVERN

By Alan Wolfe

Also: Adulterers for President!

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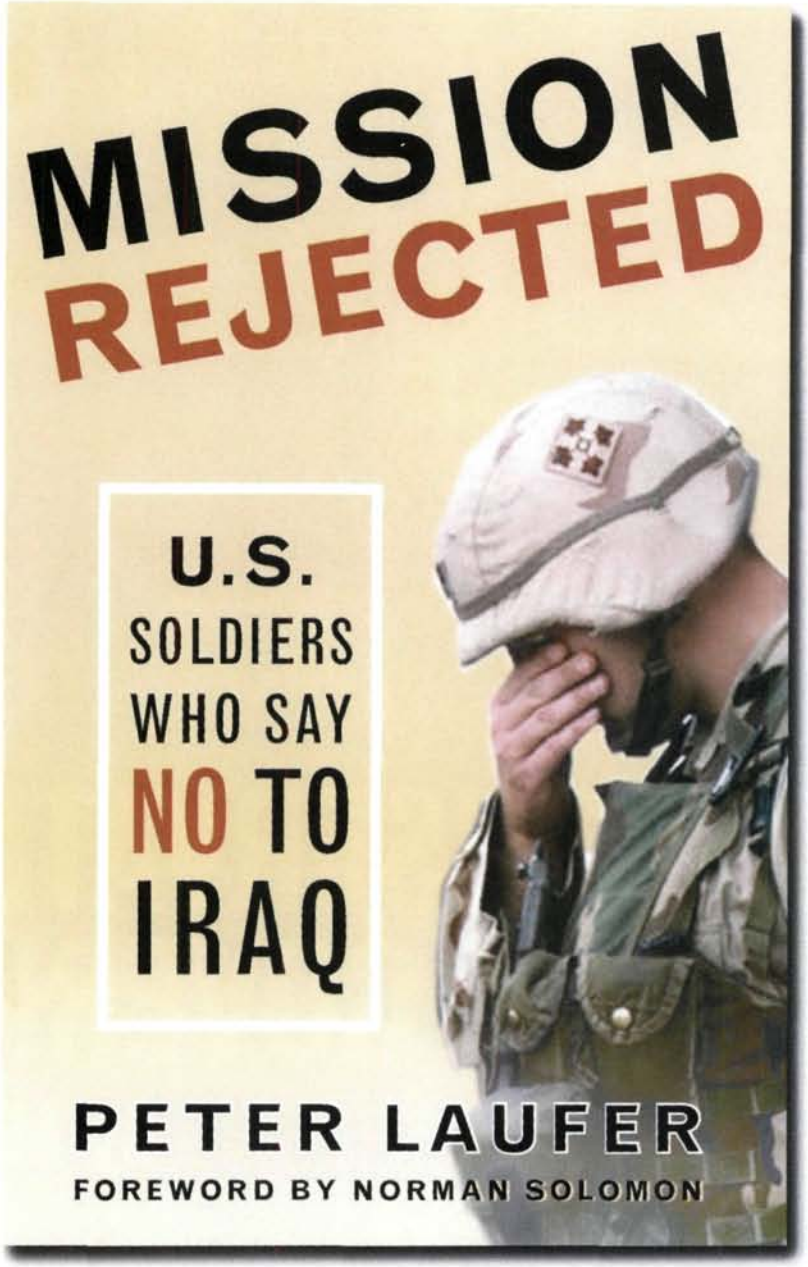

Disillusioned, outraged, and betrayed, American soldiers are taking a stand against the war in Iraq.

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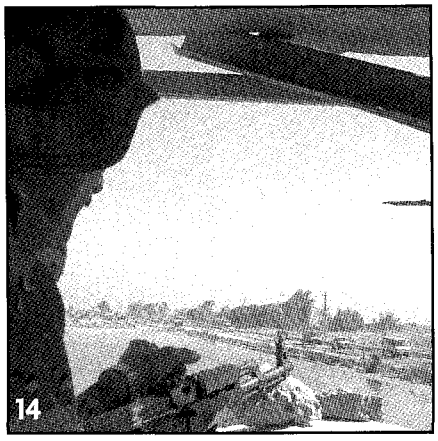

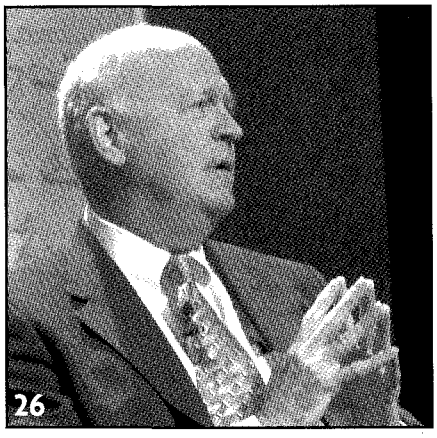

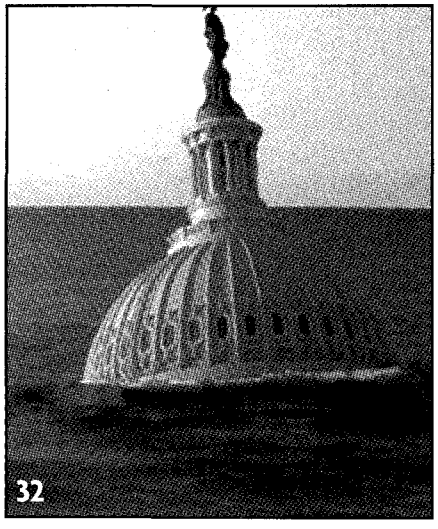

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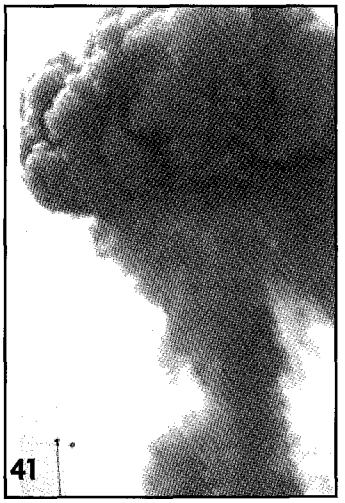
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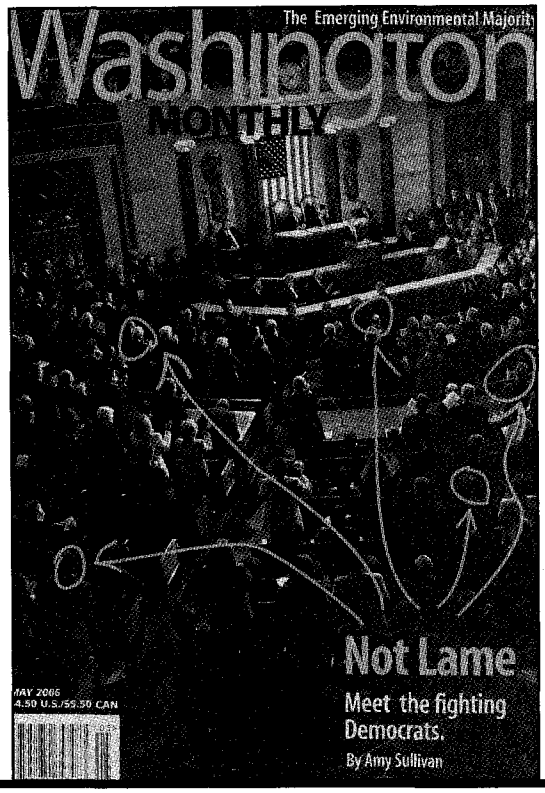

May 2006

The party faithful

A huge round of applause and thanks to Amy Sullivan for revealing the truth that Democrats are not yet ready for the trash pile of history. ("Not as Lame as You Think," May). The MSM really needs to wake up and notice what's happening out here in the grassroots and net roots, hundreds of miles from Beltway Land. Local Democratic Party leaders need to hear the good news too. In my county Democratic committee in Pennsylvania, there is excitement at having more volunteers than ever before, and stronger candidates than we've had in years. We have hopes of beating entrenched incumbent Republicans for the first time in 20 years.

NINA WALLS
Ridley Park, Pa.

Great article. Unfortunately, it probably won't get much traction with the general public. It seems, as Ms. Sullivan mentions, that the prevailing wisdom is difficult to dislodge in the public mind. It's taken rather a few too many mistakes by the current administration to dislodge the perception that they're a "well-oiled machine," just as it will likely require some time to dispel the notion that the Democratic Party has no ideas. Unfortunately, if you've stuck to the same principles of being the party of the people versus the party of big business, there's no news to report. The Democrats' development of policy to adapt to changing realities over the course of time is much less interesting than the flamethrower conservatives' hijacking of the Republican Party. Hopefully this misperception will be replaced in time for November.

RICHARD HAMMOND
Via email

> **"It's taken rather a few too many mistakes by the current administration to dislodge the perception that they're a "well-oiled machine"**

Amy Sullivan's article manages to scrape together all of the available examples of Democratic non-malfeasance to paint a portrait of impending pertinence. But the overwhelming fact is that the Democrats continue to fail in mounting meaningful resistance to any of the Republicans' major policy initiatives. It is the decline of Republican ability to generate coherent policies in the face of their increasing division, corruption and blithe arrogance that increases the appearance of Democratic competence.

The reason is obvious: The Democratic Party has become "Republican Lite." They get the same money from the same mechanisms developed by Republican operatives following the post-Watergate campaign reforms passed by Democratic majorities in the 1970s. Democrats must pipe the tunes that industry donors pay for, while lip-synching the populist platitudes that none of them abide by. It is a charade that has worn itself out.

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Democrats are ineffectual because they lack the true convictions that drive meaningful policy. The Republicans have become ineffectual because they have the wrong convictions. Now, at last the consequences of their dunderheadedness and criminality are coming home to roost.

STEVEN BIDLAKE
Bend, Ore.

I want to thank Amy Sullivan for highlighting the ways the Democratic Party has operated with guts, strategy, and political savvy. It gives me a needed shot of hope. But as for letting Pelosi and crew off the hook on the Louise Slaughter report, I just don't buy it. I tried for three straight days to get a copy of the report. I called both Pelosi's and Slaughter's offices to no avail. Why didn't their staffers explain why it wasn't available? Why couldn't they keep it on the "leaders'" Web site?

If there is a grand plan, perhaps we are being kept in the dark as cover for the party, so the Republican spotlight doesn't expose the strategy. I sure hope so. Because it gets awfully tiring out here wondering if there is anyone running the show.

GERRI CALDAROLA
Kentfield, Calif.

Amy Sullivan replies:

After trying to clear up this question ourselves, we share Ms. Caldarola's frustration with the offices of both Minority Leader Pelosi and Congresswoman Slaughter. In the article, I wrote about the routine rotation of the Slaughter report from Pelosi's homepage, which does indeed appear to have been uninfluenced by Republican criticism of the report. (The report is still available on Slaughter's website.) But the report was removed from Pelosi's webpage after the House Franking Office opened an investigation into its propriety—a fact about which neither Democratic office was very open.

I stand by my criticism of liberal bloggers who are quick to view congressional Democrats through the conventional prism that says they are weak and feckless. In this case, however, the Democratic leadership did not act with either transparency or confidence.

Hunters & tree-huggers

An excellent piece! ("The Emerging Environmental Majority," May). As a life-long fisherman, hunter, whitewater-canoer, forager and bird-watcher, I have always felt that concern for the environment is a bridge-building issue cutting across many sorts of divides. This article does an excellent job of summarizing the history of the American environmental/conservation movement.

SCOTT DIRKS
Via email

My dad started taking me hunting when I was only 3 years old. Dad loved the outdoors more than anything, and I inherited that same appreciation for nature. However, my liberal political views and my hunting always seemed to be in conflict. So I learned not to bring up hunting when I was with liberals, and not to bring up my liberal views when I was with hunters. Is that diplomacy or cowardice?

STEVE ADAIR
Via email

Sporting chance

I am delighted to read Amy Sullivan on sports ("Fake Diamonds," May). I am enjoying my first year of fantasy baseball. After spending 70-plus years as a Cubs fan, what could hurt? I am the only woman in my league and doing OK just by picking players that I have watched and admired. I spent some years in fantasy politics. Baseball is better.

SHIRLEY REID
via email

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Tilting at Windmills

By Charles Peters

The CIA's top travel agent

How did Kyle "Dusty" Foggo—who recently left the CIA under a cloud of suspicion about his relationship with his pal Brent Wilkes, a featured player in the bribery indictment of former Congressman Duke Cunningham—impress Porter Goss enough to get himself made number three at the intelligence agency? According to *The Washington Post's* David Ignatius, who has excellent Agency sources, "Foggo is said to have endeared himself to Goss and his staff director, Patrick Murray, by facilitating trips overseas for members of the House Intelligence committee [chaired by Goss]." In other words, it wasn't his spying skills that got him the job, but his knack for providing nice junkets.

But you can't say that Goss wasn't discriminating. Foggo was his second choice for the number three job. The first was Michael Kostiw, who unfortunately had to be dropped after it was revealed that he had been caught shoplifting at a Virginia supermarket.

The Un-chicken

We never tire of pointing out this administration's chickenhawks, the men like Dick Cheney who don't hesitate to send other Americans into war even though they themselves have been dedicated draft-evaders. So when we see an exception to the rule, we should acknowledge him. And Joel Kaplan, the White House's new deputy chief of staff for policy, is definitely such an exception. After graduating from Harvard Law School, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served four years as an artillery officer.

Getting it wrong at the Post

The Washington Post, which refused to do an article explaining the Medicare drug benefit to its readers, recently ran a story on its front page that strongly suggested that all was hunky-dory with the plan: "Three-quarters [of the participants] said the paperwork was easy to complete."

My experience was different. I got steered to the wrong insurance company. The Medicare phone counselor recommended it, saying that it covered the two drugs I was taking regularly, but after I signed up, I learned that the coverage was only for thirty days, and the insurer had to be persuaded by my physician to continue. When I told Medicare of this problem, they offered another suggestion. I signed up with the new company, and took my first prescription to the drugstore. It was rejected. I found out, after a week of phone calls to the new company from my pharmacist and myself, that the reason it was rejected was that the company had changed its "formulary" so that one of my drugs was no longer covered, and that it was now necessary for my doctor to persuade them that I needed it.

My experience does not appear to be unusual, at least not according to the Government Accountability Office report cited in a recent op-ed by Paul Krugman: "[W]hen Medicare recipients asked for help determining which plans would cover their medications at the lowest cost, they were given the right answer only 41 percent of the time."

It wasn't Foggo's spying skills that got him the job, but his knack for providing nice junkets.

The party favors/earmarks were fabulous

Where do you think the 2002 baby shower for Tom DeLay's daughter, Danielle, was held? In the home of a dear friend or relative? Guess again. It was, reports *The New Republic's* Michael Crowley, in the Washington offices of Reliant Energy, a major power company. It was attended by Jack Abramoff and organized by a friend of DeLay's protégé Rep. Joe Barton.

Barton is now chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee. In a lovely example of the revolving door operating in reverse, he recently hired Reliant's top lobbyist as the committee's chief of staff.

Hospital Confidential

"What Scares Doctors?" was the first half of a recent headline in *Time*; the second was, "Being A Patient." The accompanying article, which struck me as a really great idea, described what worries the insiders about what could go wrong if they

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turned from providers to customers of the health-care system. One timely example of the lessons to be learned from the article: Don't schedule elective surgery in July. That's when the new doctors are just starting their internships and are most likely to screw up. Another point is that although you're more likely to encounter a brilliant diagnostician at one of the great teaching hospitals, you will be less likely to acquire an infection at a good community hospital. The fancier the assortment of technologies the hospital employs, the more things that can go wrong.

Now that *is* madness

In March, an Alabama cow was diagnosed with mad cow disease. An investigation was launched. In May, Scott Kilman of *The Wall Street Journal* reports, the case was closed, "without learning the animal's origins." They could not trace the cow to find out what other cattle it may have been in contact with and with whom it may have shared the contaminated feed that is the suspected source of the disease.

One reason officials could not find the animal's history is that cattle owners are not required to keep records of where cows come from and where they go. National livestock identification programs do exist, reports Kilman, in "Canada, [the] European Union, and other countries that have elaborate systems to trace sick animals." Why don't we have such a system?

"Many ranchers oppose an identification system out of fear that liability for food-borne disease might end up on their doorsteps," says Kilman. "Others resent what they view as government intrusion." The best the U.S. Department of Agriculture can come up with is a voluntary system that it is pushing to implement by 2009. Mandatory systems will not be imposed until it is determined that the voluntary system is not working. By that time, one wonders just how many of our brains will have turned to Swiss cheese.

Getting it wrong at the Times

In our last issue, we criticized a sub-heading of a *New York Times* op-ed for saying that the hybrid Prius would not save gas, when the article itself actually only said that the Prius would not save gas on long trips. But doubt has been cast on even that claim by a subsequent experiment conducted by the staff of the "CBS Evening News." They drove an Expedition, an Accord, and a Prius from Miami, Fla., to Boston, Mass. The cost of the gas: Expedition $348, Accord $175, and Prius $141.

They also purchased large quantities of magic markers and poster board.

Back in 1971, this magazine won its first award with an article by former Captain Christopher Pyle, exposing that the U.S. Army had been spying on domestic political groups. The article had an impact. The Army stopped spying.

Now they're back at it. In just the month of March 2005, the Army monitored eight peace demonstrations in American cities. For example, in the weeks prior to a demonstration in Akron, Ohio, Robert Block and Jay Solomon of *The Wall Street Journal* report, "analysts at the Army's 902nd Military Intelligence Group at Fort Meade, Md., were downloading information from activist Web sites, intercepting emails, and cross-referencing this with information in police databases."

What did these military Keystone Cops do with the fruits of their espionage? They tried to make trouble for the demonstrators, sending this alert to the Akron police:

"Even though the demonstrations are advertised as 'peaceful,' they are assessed to present a potential force protection threat."

The other 71 percent couldn't spell "sub-par"

Even though the Goss gang has departed, don't be lulled into thinking that that's all the personnel change needed at the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

According to a recent survey of intelligence agency employees, reported by *The Washington Post's* Stephen Barr, "only 29 percent said their agencies take steps to deal with sub-par colleagues who cannot or will not improve their job performance."

When the parking system breaks down, the terrorists have won

For readers who miss our retired feature, the Memo of the Month, for old time's sake, here's one dug up by my friend Al Kamen. It's from the Department of Homeland Security about Janet Hale, the agency's undersecretary for management:

"Subject: RE: Parking Space #016 Ms. Janet Hale To all, Please pass the word to all employees who have inner compound parking to refrain from parking in space #016 (Ms. Janet Hale's parking space) located in front of the press conference building. On several occasions this week Ms. Hale's space has been unavailable to her in the morning."

When you wonder what Washington bigshots worry about when they clearly are not worried about your problems, you may be sure that defending or securing a privileged parking place is high on the list that arouses their deepest feelings. This is especially true of the level just below the top, where perks are less automatic and more likely to be subject to competition.

Unaccountable

Because of Fannie Mae's well-connected executives and board, it took years for the public to get even a hint of what Jerry Knight of *The Washington Post* describes as its fudged book-keeping, "stretching accounting rules like bungee cords to create fiscal fiction, deceiving stockholders, and manipulating the regulatory process."

How big is the problem? Even

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Fannie Mae doesn't know. According to Knight, to find out the facts about its finances, Fannie Mae just this year will spend $800 million.

Can't lose, except for the rest of us

If Fannie Mae is Frankenstein, then Sallie Mae is the Bride of Frankenstein. Created by Congress, Sallie Mae, like Fannie Mae, was founded to do good, encouraging student loans as Fannie Mae encouraged home mortgages. But like Fannie Mae, it became privatized, with shareholders who it wants to please with escalating profits.

Its stock price has gone up nearly 2000 percent since 1995, but "60 Minutes" recently asked a pertinent question: "Does Sallie Mae's success come at too steep a cost to taxpayers and students?"

It's a 'can't-lose' business, guaranteed by you and me. "Once a student borrower goes into default, the government pays Sallie Mae all the principal and compounded interest that have accrued," reports "60 Minutes." "The loan then passes into collection phase. If Sallie Mae is the collector, it gets to keep up to 25 percent of whatever is recovered."

I call that "can't-lose plus!"

The banks also have a can't lose proposition because they are protected from loss by Sallie Mae. Both the banks and Sallie Mae join in efforts to sabotage the government's direct-loan program, which was started in the '90s to offer competition to high-interest bank loans, but now cannot offer incentives provided by Sallie Mae to schools because Sallie Mae has lobbied Congress to prevent the government program from doing so.

Colbert's Retort

I did not attend the White House Correspondents' Dinner, so I can't speak from firsthand knowledge, but most of the people I've talked to who were there say that Stephen Colbert laid an egg. Since I am a Colbert fan, I was pained to hear this and questioned my informants more closely. It was conceded that by the time Colbert spoke, much of the audience was sodden with drink. I'm also sure that many more were exhausted by the hyperventilation that occurs when these reporters are in the company of the kind of celebrities attracted to the Correspondents' Dinner.

What may not have endeared him to the White House press corps was this: "Over the last five years, you people were so good—over tax cuts, WMD intelligence, the effect of global warming. We Americans didn't want to know, and you had the courtesy not to try to find out."

Don't schedule elective surgery in July. That's when the new doctors are just starting.

The less you make, the more they take

I loved *Esquire's* "The More You Weigh, the More You Pay"—proposing that Americans get weighed at a federal weigh station so they can be assessed a flab tax—by Joshua Foer. It was a spoof, of course, but executed with enough wit to make a good point. It reminded me of an article Taylor Branch wrote for this magazine in 1971, proposing that we cancel the national debt.

Branch put his proposal in the form of an official memo to the secretary of the Treasury, and he did it so skillfully, that quite a few people thought it was a genuine government document.

Of course, it too was a spoof, but we had a serious point in mind. At that time, the savings bonds held by the average American paid a very low rate of interest compared to that offered on the treasury notes, bills, and long bonds, largely held by wealthy individuals and financial institutions.

We wanted to dramatize this disparity. So we proposed to exempt savings bonds from cancellation, so that the average man would be repaid. Only the affluent would suffer. Branch did his job well enough that his point got across. The interest on savings bonds was increased substantially by the Carter administration.

It's time for another Joshua Foer or Taylor Branch to propose abolishing the payroll tax. Someone needs to dramatize how unfair and regressive this tax is, falling heaviest on working people. For those with wages or salaries of less than $70,000, it takes a bigger bite than the income tax.

That's the sound of the country crying uncle

Did you know about "national security letters"? I wouldn't have if I hadn't stuck it out to the last four paragraphs of a long article about the FBI by John O'Neil on page A23 of *The New York Times*. These letters, issued by the FBI to its agents, "allow agents to collect data on individuals from businesses without a court warrant." How many were issued last year? More than 9,200.

Rotten to the Corps

You may recall how impressed I was by Michael Grunwald's series on the Corps of Engineers that ran in the *Post* six years ago. It was the kind of reporting on a government agency that this magazine has not only sought to publish itself, but to encourage others to do.

Recently, Grunwald reviewed what had happened to the example

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of Corps boondoggles that he had highlighted in his story. It was a $65 million flood-control project in Missouri that would "drain more acres of wetlands than all U.S. developers do in a typical year, but wouldn't stop flooding in the town it was meant to protect."

Did the Corps cancel this ill-advised project? Certainly not. The only change that has occurred is in the cost. It is now going to take $112 million to complete.

Grunwald wonders how the Corps has escaped the lion's share of culpability for Katrina. In the blame game, it ranks far behind FEMA. Yet FEMA didn't cause the flooding. The Corps did—"a useless Corps shipping canal intensified Katrina's surge…Poorly designed Corps floodwalls collapsed just a few feet from an unnecessary $750 million Corps navigation project, even though the Corps had promoted development in dangerously low-lying New Orleans flood plains and had helped destroy the vast marshes that once provided the city's natural flood protection."

The reason the Corps successfully dodged responsibility and resisted reform until accepting some blame in June is the iron triangle, composed of career Corps bureaucrats, the contractors who make millions in profits from Corps projects, however lunatic, and the members of Congress for whom the Corps projects offer some of the juiciest slices of pork available.

Fortunately, the next terrorist attack isn't scheduled until next year

You will recall that the great anthrax scare happened in the fall of 2001. Now, almost five years later, we learn this from Justin Gillis of *The Washington Post*: "The government's $1 billion effort to develop a new anthrax vaccine has run into difficulty, with the company in charge [VaxGen Inc.] of the project reporting failure in a major human test, and falling at least a year behind schedule."

Many observers warned that a small company like VaxGen would not be able to meet the deadline for producing 25 million doses of vaccine by this November, but they were ignored by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Putting the pro in pro-government

During my lifetime, Republicans have been the anti-government party and Democrats the pro-government party. Mostly that's put the Democrats on the right side. We need government to do lots of things, from controlling air traffic to protecting us against disease. The Republican attitude cost them in the case of Katrina, when their indifference to the quality of the people they hired led to a major embarrassment.

It seems to me, however, that the Democrats are also in danger. Their automatic pro-government attitude has brought them powerful allies in the government employees and teachers unions—now the strongest force in the labor movement. But these allies come at a price. They make Democrats reluctant to take on the need to improve government and reform public education, especially when these efforts involve dismissing incompetent teachers and civil servants.

The truth is that much of government cries out for major change—in policy and in personnel, and not just in personnel at the top, which is where the Democrats prefer to concentrate their efforts. We need a much better CIA, a much better FBI, and a much better Department of Homeland Security, just to name a few. And we aren't going to have them unless we're willing to face the fact that better people are needed throughout government. Nor are we going to have the public education to make us competitive in the 21st century without better teachers. This is not to say there are not a lot of good people in the civil service and teaching in public schools now—and they should be our friends and allies—but we must face the fact that we need many more.

That's the way we do it in Vienna, Virginia

Back to Porter Goss's number three, Dusty Foggo. One of the more bizarre episodes in his colorful career occurred while he was stationed in Vienna in the '80s. "Foggo allegedly beat an Austrian citizen with a baseball bat after the man cut him off in traffic, according to three former and current senior intelligence officials," reports Mark Hosenball of *Newsweek*. "The sources say the incident was serious enough that the Austrian government lodged a complaint with the U.S. Embassy in Vienna." Dusty claims that the report was exaggerated.

Going public

If we're going to attract the many more good people that are needed in government, we need to do a much better job of explaining why public service can be a great career.

The Charleston Gazette recently ran an article on Silas Taylor, who has spent more than 20 years in the office of the Attorney General of West Virginia. Among other things, he has fought to protect Medicaid recipients from having their homes seized by the feds and to keep West Virginia from being used as a dumping ground for New York sewage. He says, "[W]e've taken on battles that couldn't possibly be taken on in private practice … It's just so much fun to be involved in public policy."

I felt the same way. I was luckier than most young lawyers in private practice in having roughly half my work be for clients with interesting and worthwhile causes, but that did leave the other half. So I felt light-years better in the months I worked in the West Virginia legislature and was able to serve the public interest every minute.

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"...such district (not exceeding ten mile square)...[shall] become the seat of the government of the United States.
-THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

High Infidelity

What if three admitted adulterers run for president and no one cares?

By Steve Benen

Last month, *The New York Times* published a 2,000-word, front-page dissection of Bill and Hillary Clinton's marriage. It contained no real news, few named sources, and plenty of gossip masquerading as political coverage. Observing that the Clintons typically spend 14 days of each month together—hardly unusual for a couple that includes a senator and a peripatetic former president—the *Times* opted for the half-empty conclusion that the two lead "largely separate lives." The story also made an oblique reference to a Canadian politician named Belinda Stronach, the significance of which would likely be grasped only by insiders and people who read tabloids at supermarket check-outs. In a cover article last year, the *Globe* claimed that Stronach and Clinton were more than just good friends.

If the *Times* had evidence to support the innuendo, it decided not to print it. But despite the vaporous quality of the story's facts, David Broder's *Washington Post* column just 48 hours later indicated that a new conventional wisdom was forming, one which sought to undermine Hillary's presidential ambitions. After describing his boredom at a substantive speech the senator gave to reporters on energy policy, Broder concluded that the failure of reporters in the post-speech Q&A to grill Hillary about her personal relationship with her husband was the "elephant in the room."

Of course, there was once a time when reporters believed that the sexual peccadilloes of American leaders were a private matter, and the nation was probably better off for that belief. In the late 1990s, Broder himself argued several times that these kinds of stories don't do voters any favors. But the rules were shifting, thanks largely to the mainstream press and the GOP's relentless pursuit of Bill Clinton. Now the *Times* piece suggests that we're in for three long years in which reporters will judge Hillary Clinton's character by rumors about her husband. But it may be Republicans who have the most to lose.

Lurking just over the horizon are liabilities for three Republicans who have topped several national, independent polls for the GOP's favorite 2008 nominee: Sen. John McCain (affair, divorce), former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (affair, divorce, affair, divorce), and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani (divorce, affair, nasty divorce). Together, they form the most maritally challenged crop of presidential hopefuls in American political history.

Until relatively recently, a self-confessed adulterer had never sought the presidency. Certainly, other candidates have been dogged

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by sex scandals. In the 1828 presidential election, John Quincy Adams questioned whether Andrew Jackson's wife was legitimately divorced from her first husband before she married Old Hickory. Grover Cleveland, who was single, fathered a child out of wedlock, a fact that sparked national headlines during the 1884 election (though he managed to win anyway). There have been presidential candidates who had affairs that the press decided not to write about, like Wendell Wilkie, FDR, and John F. Kennedy. And there have been candidates whose infidelities have been uncovered during the course of a campaign: Gary Hart's indiscretions ultimately derailed his 1988 bid, and in 1992, during the course of his campaign, Bill Clinton was forced to make the euphemistic admission that he "caused pain" in his marriage.

But it wasn't until 2000 that McCain, possibly emboldened by Clinton's survival of his scandals, became the first confessed adulterer to have the nerve to run. Now, just a few years after infidelity was considered a dealbreaker for a presidential candidate, the party that presents itself as the arbiter of virtue may field an unprecedented two-timing trifecta.

McCain was still married and living with his wife in 1979 while, according to *The New York Times'* Nicholas Kristof, "aggressively courting a 25-year-old woman who was as beautiful as she was rich." McCain divorced his wife, who had raised their three children while he was imprisoned in Vietnam, then launched his political career with his new wife's family money. In 2000, McCain managed to deflect media questioning about his first marriage with a deft admission of responsibility for its failure. It's possible that the age of the offense and McCain's charmed relationship with the press will pull him through again, but Giuliani and Gingrich may face a more difficult challenge. Both conducted well-documented affairs in the last decade—while still in public office.

Giuliani informed his second wife, Donna Hanover, of his intention to seek a separation in a 2000 press conference. The announcement was precipitated by a tabloid frenzy after Giuliani marched with his then-mistress, Judith Nathan, in New York's St. Patrick's Day parade, an acknowledgement of infidelity so audacious that *Daily News* columnist Jim Dwyer compared it with "groping in the window at Macy's." In the acrid divorce proceedings that followed, Hanover accused Giuliani of serial adultery, alleging that Nathan was just the latest in a string of mistresses, following an affair the mayor had had with his former communications director.

But the most notorious of them all is undoubtedly Gingrich, who ran for Congress in 1978 on the slogan, "Let Our Family Represent Your Family." (He was reportedly cheating on his first wife at the time). In 1995, an alleged mistress from that period, Anne Manning, told *Vanity Fair's* Gail Sheehy: "We had oral sex. He prefers that modus operandi because then he can say, 'I never slept with her.'" Gingrich obtained his first divorce in 1981, after forcing his wife, who had helped put him through graduate school, to haggle over the terms while in the hospital, as she recovered from uterine cancer surgery. In 1999, he was disgraced again,

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY'S
Monthly Journalism Award

DAVID KELLY and GARY COHN

The Los Angeles Times
"The Enclave"
May 12 & 13, 2006

While fears over same-sex marriage have caused lawmakers in Washington to debate amending the Constitution to limit marriage to one man and one woman, few lawmakers have expressed any apparent desire to crack down on polygamy. As Federal Marriage Amendment sponsor Orrin Hatch noted in 2003, "All I can say is, I know people in Hildale who are polygamists who are very fine people."

In a series of articles in May 2006, *Los Angeles Times* reporters David Kelly and Gary Cohn take a hard look at whether polygamous communities are really so fine after all, concentrating on a 10,000-strong community on the border of Arizona and Utah. What they found among members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—an offshoot of Mormonism—was a culture of "widespread sexual abuse and child exploitation" in which "girls as young as 13 are forced into marriage." Equally disturbing was the finding that, for the past fifty years, "government authorities on all levels did little to intervene or protect generations of victims."

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having been caught in an affair with a 33-year-old congressional aide while spearheading the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton.

Despite the scandalous details, whether the press will air them is still an open question. When it comes to personal morality, liberal commentators have long argued that the press has one standard for Democrats and another for Republicans (and another one entirely for the Clintons). It's possible that the mainstream media will fail to apply the same scrutiny to the known transgressions of Gingrich, Giuliani and McCain as the *Times* did to rumors about Hillary Clinton's husband. But for that to happen, the press will have to resist four powerful political dynamics that will almost certainly be pushing to get the story out.

Cheat and greet

The first dynamic is the competition among the contenders in a crowded GOP presidential primary. Right now, at least 10 high-profile Republicans are eyeing the race. If a candidate with an adulterous past pulls ahead, the stragglers may be sorely tempted to play the infidelity card—if not openly, then through their surrogates. In 2000, George W. Bush's allies went well beyond raising McCain's affair—they spread bogus rumors in advance of the South Carolina primary that the senator had fathered an illegitimate black child. This strategy helped to deliver Bush a key primary victory and, arguably, the nomination.

But if GOP operatives dangle the infidelity bait, and the press fails to bite, its importance to Christian conservatives won't be so easy to ignore. Since the press awoke to the phenomenon of evangelicals in 2000 and so-called "values voters" in 2004, reporters have become fond of gaming out every possible permutation of evangelicals' political concerns. Evangelicals' attitudes towards the marital problems of McCain, Giuliani and Gingrich might actually deserve such an inquiry. In 2000, for example, James Dobson issued a personal press release specifically to "clarify his lack of support for Senator McCain." "The Senator is being touted by the media as a man of principle, yet he was involved with other women while married to his first wife," Dobson said. He also cautioned that McCain's character was "reminiscent" of Bill Clinton's—

Didn't build Jack

Lately, adults have been down on Jack Abramoff, but, if they'd been ten-year-olds in Silver Spring, sometime in the mid-1990s, they probably would have thought Mr. Abramoff from down the street was a pretty awesome dude. According to former neighbors, when Jack wasn't at the office committing ethics violations, he was at home playing a veritable Fred Rogers. Neighbors say the Abramoffs took a great interest in local schools and even organized martial arts training for kids in the community. Best of all, Jack drew on Hollywood connections forged while writing and producing "Red Scorpion" (a seminal anti-communist feature starring Dolph Lundgren) and had the neighborhood children over to meet the cast of the TV show "Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers." (Abramoff told *Roll Call* that actor Austin St. John, the red-costumed Ranger, was especially interested in taxation and regulation issues.)

Jack's greed didn't entirely disappear in the suburban setting, however. When the money really started to roll in, the Abramoffs relocated to a residence more appropriate for hosting influential players on the Hill. Looking to make an extra buck, Jack divided his property into two lots for sale: one containing his charming brick home, and another ideally suited for, well, nothing. At a width of roughly 22 yards, just over the 20 required for a residential building permit, the lot is just a few feet from the side of Abramoff's old house, with little room to spare. Reached by phone, a Maryland zoning official explained that the lot might be suitable for a home, but only if the residence were built perpendicular to the road. (Architectural additions of this sort, said a member of the community's civic association, are generally "not appreciated.") Records show that the only building permit approved for the lot since it was sold off in 1999 has been for a chain-link fence, an "eyesore," complains one neighbor, that meshes imperfectly with the stone or wood variety generally favored in the area. The lot's present owner, who bought it from Jack for $135,000, said she had "no interest" in talking to *The Washington Monthly*. Perhaps, like the Coushatta tribe, she's less than thrilled about having paid something for nothing. – Jeffrey Van der Veer

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What you can't argue is that it's OK for the press to scrutinize one party's candidates and not the other's.

possibly the ultimate insult in conservative circles.

These remarks received little attention in 2000, possibly because reporters hadn't yet grasped the extent of Dobson's influence, but Carrie Gordon Earll, a spokesperson for Dobson's Focus on the Family, recently made it clear that the adultery issue hasn't lost any of its toxicity among evangelicals. "If you have a politician, an elected official, and they can't be trusted in their own marriage, how can I trust them with the budget? How can I trust them with national security?" she asked me. Although Earll was reluctant to discuss specific politicians, she noted that a candidate who "had an affair and then moved on and restored that marriage" might find forgiveness with Christian conservatives, but someone "who had an affair and then left his wife" would not.

If the press still doesn't focus on the GOP infidelity issue and one of the adulterers manages to win the nomination, a third dynamic will kick in: hopping-mad Democrats. After enduring the trauma of the Clinton years, and the indignity of John Kerry fending off baseless reports of a fling with a reporter in 2004, it's hard to imagine Democrats playing nice in 2008, especially in light of the high bar Republicans have set for themselves on "character" issues. What's more, there's not a single known adulterer among the 10 or so names most commonly mentioned as potential Democratic presidential contenders. What would any of them lose by unleashing their attack dogs on his or her opponent's checkered past (presuming they don't have a skeleton in their own closet)?

Finally, if the Democrats fail to plant this story in the press, one final force will be beating at their doors: liberal bloggers. Witness the indignation that swept the progressive blogosphere immediately after the *Times* piece ran on the Clintons. Hullabaloo's Digby fumed at the *Times*' "cheap, tabloid coverage of politics when the world is on fire." Matt Stoller at MyDD noted published rumors of a Jeb Bush affair with then-Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, adding, "Get ready for a slimefest." Bloggers are likely not only to relentlessly push the mainstream press to start covering Republican candidates' adultery, but may also ferret out new information about those past indiscretions that could prove awfully tempting to establishment reporters.

Of course, the right-wing blogosphere will be pushing back just as hard, aiming (along with GOP campaign operatives) to intimidate the mainstream press into not covering Republican infidelities. The party with years of experience exploiting "values" for electoral gain will no doubt dismiss the marital troubles of Gingrich, Giuliani and McCain as "old news" and the "politics of personal destruction," marking any reporter who brings up the subject guilty of "bias." Indeed, it's likely that establishment reporters will be grateful to have that argument as an excuse to steer clear of the subject altogether. But an excuse is all it will be. After all, in every presidential campaign, the press typically rehashes known facts about a candidate's past (think Bush's National Guard service, or Kerry's Vietnam record) on the theory that many voters aren't aware of them, and that new information relevant to voters often will emerge in the retelling.

It'd be dishonest to say that liberals won't take some satisfaction in seeing the Republicans undone by their own standards. But if the top three Democratic presidential hopefuls each had extra-marital affairs in their backgrounds, it stands to reason that Republicans would have something to say about it—and if the past is any guide, those concerns would find their way into the papers. Of course, you could argue that we'd all benefit if reporters didn't write about any of this. But you could also argue that the support voters gave Bill Clinton suggests that they can handle the truth and are capable of distinguishing between public and private behavior. Perhaps the very fact that Gingrich, Giuliani and McCain are even considering presidential runs reflects a growing maturity in American politics.

What you can't argue, however, is that it's OK for the press to scrutinize one party's candidates and not the other's. If Hillary Clinton's marriage has been publicly dissected on the front page of the newspaper of record, why should the marital infidelities of GOP candidates be off limits? The answer is, they shouldn't be, and despite the mainstream press' deep reluctance, they probably won't be.

Steve Benen is a freelance writer. His blog is The Carpetbagger Report.

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The Next Kofi Annan?

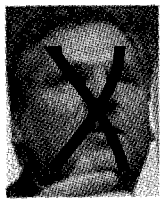
Too American

Bill Clinton

Too American

Tony Blair

Too Polish



Aleksander Kwasniewski

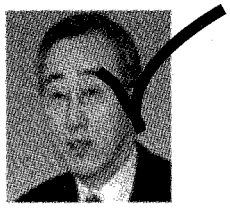
Too weak

Jayantha Dhanapala

Too repressed

Aung San Suu Kyi

Just right



Ban Ki Moon

In their obsession over upcoming midterm elections, Washingtonians and others may have missed another political transition coming up this year. In December, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan steps down to make room for a new head of the world. The election of a successor won't really be that democratic. The 15 members of the Security Council—well, really the five permanent members—will squabble privately and find someone they can live with. Then they'll toss the choice down to the General Assembly for a yea or nay vote—usually yea (it's faster that way). Any campaigning will be done discreetly.

There are already numerous rumored contenders. Some are celebrities, like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. But these are long shots. The United States would be lucky to gain chairmanship of a U.N. committee on international parking in these times, and Britain, as its best mate, would fare no better.

By tradition, the post is supposed to rotate by continent, more or less like the Olympics.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, has already hinted that Eastern Europe should be next on the list, an allusion to his enthusiasm for Aleksander Kwasniewski, former president of Poland. But, if Bolton's support weren't already enough to doom Kwasniewski's bid, Moscow has also made clear it won't stand for an Eastern European.

Asia is the most likely region to produce the next leader, since the U.N. has never had an Asian secretary general. China, as a member of the Security Council, is effectively out of the running. Japan won't get any nods (it's too disliked in Asia), nor will Taiwan (it was booted out in 1971), nor will North Korea (where does one begin). Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi has been mentioned by some U.N. watchers, but her current house arrest status would require an excessive amount of telecommuting. That leaves three frontrunners: Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart Sathirathai of Thailand, former Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Dhanapala Jayantha of Sri Lanka, and Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon of South Korea. Each combines regional flavor and nomenclatural freshness. Jayantha Dhanapala is respected but considered a bit weak in his management skills, and Surakiart Sathirathai, while popular among Southeast Asian nations, is undermined by Thai domestic politics, which are turbulent these days. Which brings us to Ban Ki Moon. Easiest of the three to spell and pronounce, Ban is also a reputed favorite of Michael Green, the White House National Security Council's senior director for Asia until January. Better still, Ban from a country that peacefully transitioned to a prosperous democracy. So Ban it is. Case closed. Oh, sorry, is the rest of the world okay with that?

– Soyoung Ho

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Operation Iraqi Free Ride

Thanks to administration stonewalling, only one crooked contractor in Iraq has been brought to justice. And there's even more to that story.

By Dean Starkman

Last March, Custer Battles, a McLean, Virginia-based security contractor run by Scott Custer, a former Army Ranger, and Mike Battles, an occasional Fox News commentator and one-time Republican candidate for Congress, was found by a federal jury to have defrauded the government of $3 million in contracting services in Iraq. Its crime was brought to light by whistleblowers within the company. Among many other tricks, the firm had issued fake invoices and created sham companies to fool its employer into paying for services not provided. Sometimes, Custer Battles was less devious: In one case, according to the trial testimony of retired Brigadier General Hugh Tant III, the company was hired to provide trucks to the military, but the vehicles it procured didn't run, and had to be towed from the site. When confronted, Mike Battles replied: "You asked for trucks...it is immaterial whether the trucks were operational." Tant, who oversaw the contract, called Custer Battles's work "probably the worst I've seen in my 30 years in the army."

Custer Battles is the only CPA-era whistleblower case to go to trial, but a slew of evidence has now emerged pointing to widespread waste, fraud, abuse, and negligence in the awarding and oversight of Iraq reconstruction contracts. Stuart W. Bowen Jr., the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, wrote in a report that the authority's "less than adequate" financial controls left "no assurance" that $8.8 billion in seized Iraqi funds was used properly. But the Bush administration and its allies have blocked most other high-profile efforts to gather more information about further instances of abuse. The administration has invoked an obscure part of the False Claims Act to prevent all but one of more than 50 whistleblower suits brought by employees of U.S. contractors in Iraq from moving forward to trial. And the Republican Congress has held only cursory hearings on the contracting process.

That essentially means that we'll get little new information on Iraq's reconstruction-contracting disaster unless Congress changes hands in November. But Custer Battles itself may not be so lucky. This summer will likely see the start of the second phase of the company's trial, which will focus on allegations that, on a contract to provide security for Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), Custer Battles short-changed the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) by diverting airport guards to other jobs. Whatever the result of that trial, an investigation by *The Washington Monthly* into Custer Battles's handling of the airport job makes clear that the firm played by its own rules—quickly setting out to expand the size of the area under its control, and resisting, with striking success, attempts by CPA and military authorities to hold it accountable. It also suggests that the chronically disorganized environment in which Custer Battles was operating exacerbated the problems. In this sense, the story of Custer Battles and the Baghdad International Airport offers a window onto the broader shortcomings of a chaotic and failed occupation.

Terminal neglect

In the weeks after the fall of Saddam Hussein, reopening the airport quickly emerged as a priority for the nascent CPA. A working airport would be crucial in encouraging foreign trade and investment, and in helping to get the Iraqi economy back on its feet. In June, CPA officials issued a Request for Proposal for airport security, with bids due just three days later. According to the request, the job involved guarding a 700-acre complex of terminals, administrative buildings, residences and more, while fending off "disruptive elements" that continued to "prey upon coalition forces in and around Baghdad." Four days after the bids were due, Mike Battles received an email from Scott Custer: "We just won BIAP. CALL ME ASAP."

Dean Starkman is a freelance journalist in New York.

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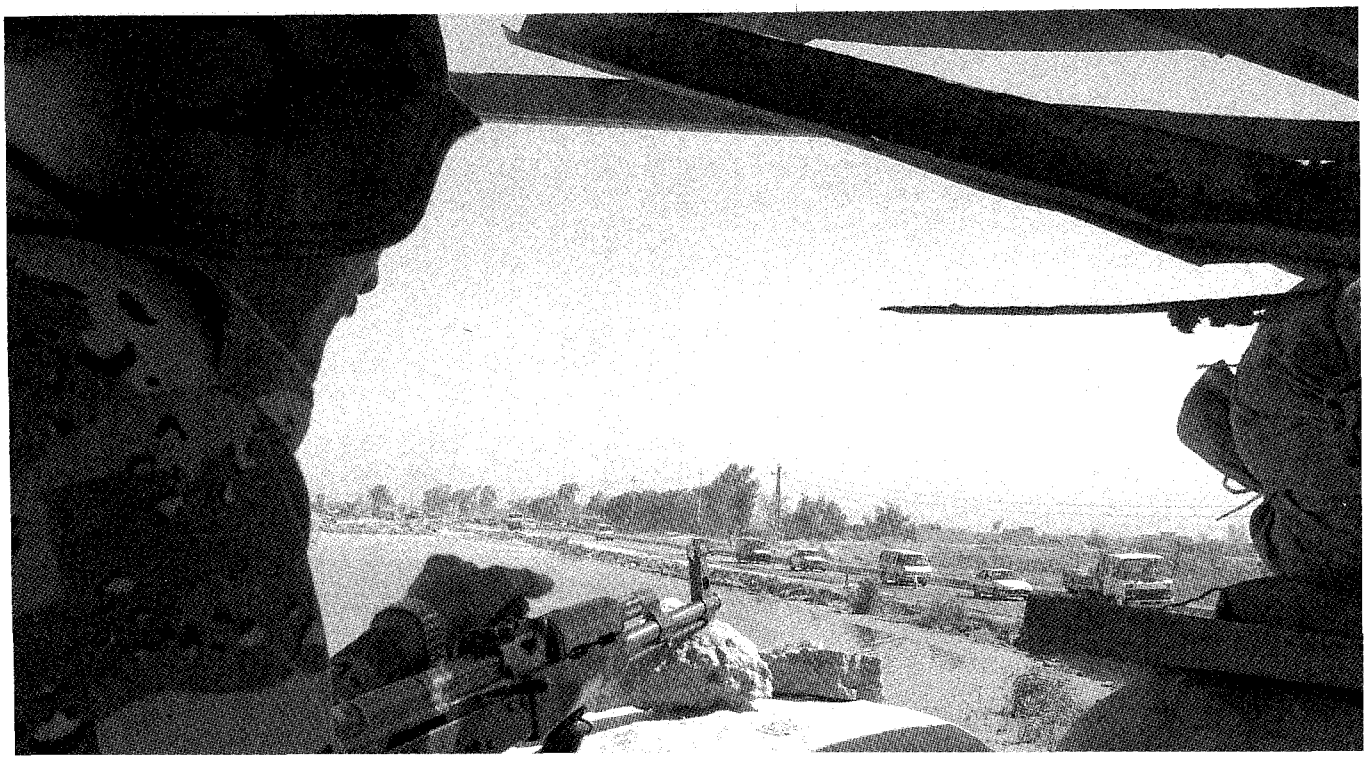

According to records obtained by *The Washington Monthly*, the hasty award was made by a committee of five "select" CPA members, headed by Franklin Hatfield, a senior Department of Transportation (DOT) official who was reporting back to the office of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta in Washington, D.C. The committee also included Vincent Taylor, an assistant DOT secretary. A few days later, Custer Battles signed a "letter contract" for $16.8 million with Hatfield. In an interview, Taylor says he was presented with the list of candidates and doesn't know how Custer Battles came to be on it. In considering bids, he says, he was acting as an Army officer, not a DOT official, and at the time was heading three battalions with a mission to "do anything and everything to get that city of Baghdad" up and running, including opening the airport quickly. Speed, he says, was the key factor in choosing Custer Battles.

But from the start there were questions about Custer Battles's qualifications. "They had never hired a security guard in their lives," says Alan Grayson, a lawyer who is suing Custer Battles on behalf of two whistleblowers. "They had no equipment, no revenues, no personnel, no office, no history—no nothing." David Douglass, Custer Battles's lawyer, says the firm's principals had experience providing security for relief organizations and performing other essential logistical tasks in post-conflict environments, including Afghanistan. But Douglas acknowledges that Custer Battles as a firm had never handled a job of anything like this size and complexity.

Almost immediately, the company was operating as if Baghdad were the Wild West—and the chaotic CPA often encouraged this approach. With Iraq's banking system in shambles, contractors were frequently paid from a stash of cash in the basement of the Republican Palace, according to Frank Willis, a Ministry of Transportation (MOT) aide. One day, Willis was working in the MOT offices when someone entered pushing a wheelbarrow filled with $2 million in bricks of $100 bills. A short time later, a team of grim-faced men from Custer Battles strode in, carrying heavy weapons and duffel bags. The men stuffed the cash into bags, piled into a Chevy Suburban, and sped off. A few months later, an official acting as the airport's director emailed officials at the MOT complaining that Custer Battles was taking over big chunks of the airport for Filipino workers, Gurkhas, dogs, and more. "Needless to say, our Iraqi partners are absolutely livid over…Custer Battles's obvious disregard for any type of civilized process of acquiring space," the director wrote. "Nowhere in the civilized world would the airport owner or operator tolerate these actions." David Douglass, Custer Battles's lawyer, says that various government officials authorized the firm's moves.

Something had to be done to keep Custer Battles in line. A State Department lawyer arrived to formalize their contract, which had been written on the fly. But he soon returned home, badly shaken, after a rocket shell landed in his hotel closet. In October, Colonel Richard Ballard, an inspector general for the coalition forces, arrived with orders from Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of US ground troops in Iraq, to "verify that the contract is being performed as represented." Custer Battles, it appeared, resented this intrusion, and soon was informed by its lawyers at the high-powered Washington law firm of Arnold & Porter that it might not need to cooperate with Ballard. "It is unclear what authority he has to review a contract that the CPA entered, particularly considering that the CPA relies on seized Iraqi assets, not Department of Defense dollars to compensate Custer

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Battles," a lawyer at Arnold & Porter wrote in an email to Custer. So when Ballard returned to the firm's airport offices, no one would give him the time of day. "I told him that none of our employees would speak to him and I asked him not to put them in an awkward situation by asking them questions," a subordinate wrote Custer. "And wouldn't you know it? At the end of the conversation he asked if I could direct him to the Duty Free shop." In a later email to a staffer, Custer wrote: "Col. Ballard has no authority to discuss any issue with us...Please post a guard."

Subsequent efforts to keep the firm in line were no more successful. Ed McVaney, an MOT staffer assigned to try to rework the Custer Battles contract, soon reported back to MOT chief Darrell Trent that Custer Battles had blown off his requests for information and disregarded demands to move the kennels and evict the Filipinos. Amid another dispute with the firm over payment, McVaney wrote a furious note to Trent, calling Custer Battles "incompetent," "deceitful," "manipulative," and "war profiteers." He added: "Other than that, they're 'swell fellows.' "

By this point, Ballard had reached a similar conclusion. In an email to MOT officials, he lambasted the contractor's performance in manning a vehicle checkpoint at the airport, complaining of "grossly inadequate techniques, poorly-trained and equipped personnel, [and] inadequate equipment including lack of dogs and interpreters." Ballard also registered concern that the CPA had improperly approved Custer Battles's performance, despite clear evidence that the company had failed to fulfill its contractual obligations. "A formal audit," he wrote, "would likely conclude fraud and potentially gross negligence in the area of contract oversight." In an email a few weeks later, Ballard recounted visiting a Custer Battles-manned checkpoint at BIAP: "On every single occasion we visited the inspection point, we were told that no one was in charge, all were equals, and that this worked just fine for them. However we would then check and discover that no one was wearing protective gear; no one had radios back to their base camp, and when we challenged them to use the cell phones [that] they said worked just as well, on one occasion two had dead batteries." Ballard also noted that Custer Battles employees didn't use metal detectors and ignored suggestions that an interrogator look over paperwork while a two-man team inspected each vehicle. "What horrified us most of all, however," Ballard wrote, "was their refusal to open the cargo doors of lorries to inspect." Douglass says the firm faithfully fulfilled the terms of its contract to protect BIAP and that the airport had no major security breaches during the period Custer Battles was in charge. "Measure our performance by what was in the contract. We did what was asked: We maintained security in a very dangerous situation."

For their part, CPA contracting officials sent Custer Battles a letter detailing numerous concerns regarding the company's performance on the airport contract. In response, they received a nine-page memo from Arnold & Porter, informing them that modifications to the original contract had been approved by a variety of U.S. officials "with apparent authority"—including Hatfield, the DOT official, and Taylor, the assistant transportation secretary and Army colonel, who "specifically" gave the firm office space at the airport. According to Taylor, "I merely said I didn't have a problem with it. I didn't have that kind of authority."

In November, word got around that an agent from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service was looking into "potential irregularities" in Custer Battles's handling of the currency exchange project. But the firm remained on the government payroll. That was in part because, thanks to turf battles and political infighting within the CPA, no one could agree on what to do about the company. One camp, comprised mainly of DOT staffers like Hatfield, supported the firm to the end. Trent, the MOT chief, wanted to fire them. But still others believed that the mission was difficult enough without getting rid of them. The CPA's chief financial officer said in a memo that firing Custer Battles would have a "disastrous impact" on the currency exchange program, and confirmed that the company would be kept on.

Running aground

By that time, the firm's leaders were receiving stern warnings of impending disaster. Just as Ballard was firing off angry emails to MOT, one Custer Battles executive offered a litany of the firm's failings in a memo to a colleague. These included serious problems with (or an outright lack of) administrative procedures; a faulty command-and-control system in the field, especially at the airport; and a lack of accountability for tracking weapons and other sensitive items. He concluded: "I do not have a really good feeling about the company right now...unless some things are fundamentally changed this whole thing could very easily implode."

That same month, the company's Iraq country manager, William D. "Pete" Baldwin, who would later become a whistleblower, sent an even more alarming memo, this time to Custer and Battles themselves. Detailing problems with employee retention, staff morale, gravely inadequate accounting procedures, and other issues, Baldwin all but begged his bosses to pay attention: "Professional emails have not really worked. Maybe this one will!" he wrote. "ICE BERGS AHEAD. You ARE IN AN ICE PACK traveling full speed ahead and you are not listening to me down here. Members of the crew are already abandoning the ship, expect tragic end soon!"

That tragic end did not come soon: Custer Battles served out the remaining months of its contract to guard BIAP. But it may come this summer.

♦

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Shill Wind

All of Washington's political reporters read ABC's The Note. That's why they keep missing the story.

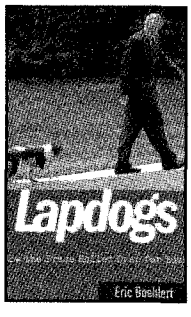
By Eric Boehlert

In the spring of 2005, a story came along that was so important, so history-altering that it threatened to revive a killer press instinct that had been dormant for the previous four years. Of course, it helped that it was a Clinton-flavored scandal: That May, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's former campaign finance director, David Rosen, went on trial for his handling of a 2000 fundraiser staged in Hollywood to benefit Clinton's campaign for the U.S. Senate. Rosen was accused of hiding, or underreporting, $800,000 worth of costs. At the time, CNN political editor John Mercurio suggested that Rosen's funny money trial "reminds people of Whitewater" and the "sleazy side of the Clinton administration that [Hillary] and the president are both trying to forget."

Taking the lead in trumpeting the importance of the Rosen trial was ABC's The Note. An inside-baseball daily tip sheet for a readership it has dubbed the "Gang of 500" (politicians, lobbyists, consultants, and journalists who help shape the Beltway's public agenda), The Note is posted online every weekday morning and is widely viewed as the agenda-setter for the political class. On fourteen different days between May 2 and 27, The Note posted cumulatively nearly forty links to Rosen-related articles, calling them "must-read." A typical Note entry came on May 10, highlighting "The opening and closing paragraphs in Dick Morris' *New York Post* column—perfectly explaining why the David Rosen story is going to be with us for a while."

On the day before the Rosen verdict, The Note listed "Waiting for the Rosen verdict" as the number-one priority among the Gang of 500. The next day, a federal jury acquitted Rosen of any wrongdoing. How did The Note handle this news about the trial it had hyped? By ignoring it. The next edition of The Note included a long round-up of must-reads from the Memorial Day weekend. Rosen's not-guilty verdict was not among them.

The abrupt disappearance of the story shouldn't have surprised close readers of The Note, which ABC's website has posted publicly since January 2002. In theory, what drives The Note is anything that's generating Beltway buzz. "We try to channel what the chattering class is chattering about, and to capture the sensibility, ethos, and rituals of the Gang of 500," Mark Halperin, ABC's political director and founder of The Note, once explained. Too often, though, The Note's definition of buzz has been whatever Beltway Republicans are chattering about. The Note has been nourished on an era of total Republican rule. It shows.



Eric Boehlert, a contributing editor to Rolling Stone, is author of the book *Lapdogs: How the Press Rolled Over for Bush* (Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.), from which this article is adapted. Copyright 2006 Eric Boehlert.

Too cool for school

The first thing you notice about The Note is that it sounds like it's written by high school students. Smart high school students—really smart students, even—but nevertheless teenagers who crack themselves up with their wit, rely on hard-to-decipher references to up their hip insider quotient, and have a penchant for words like "ginormous" and multiple exclamation points. Cutesy,

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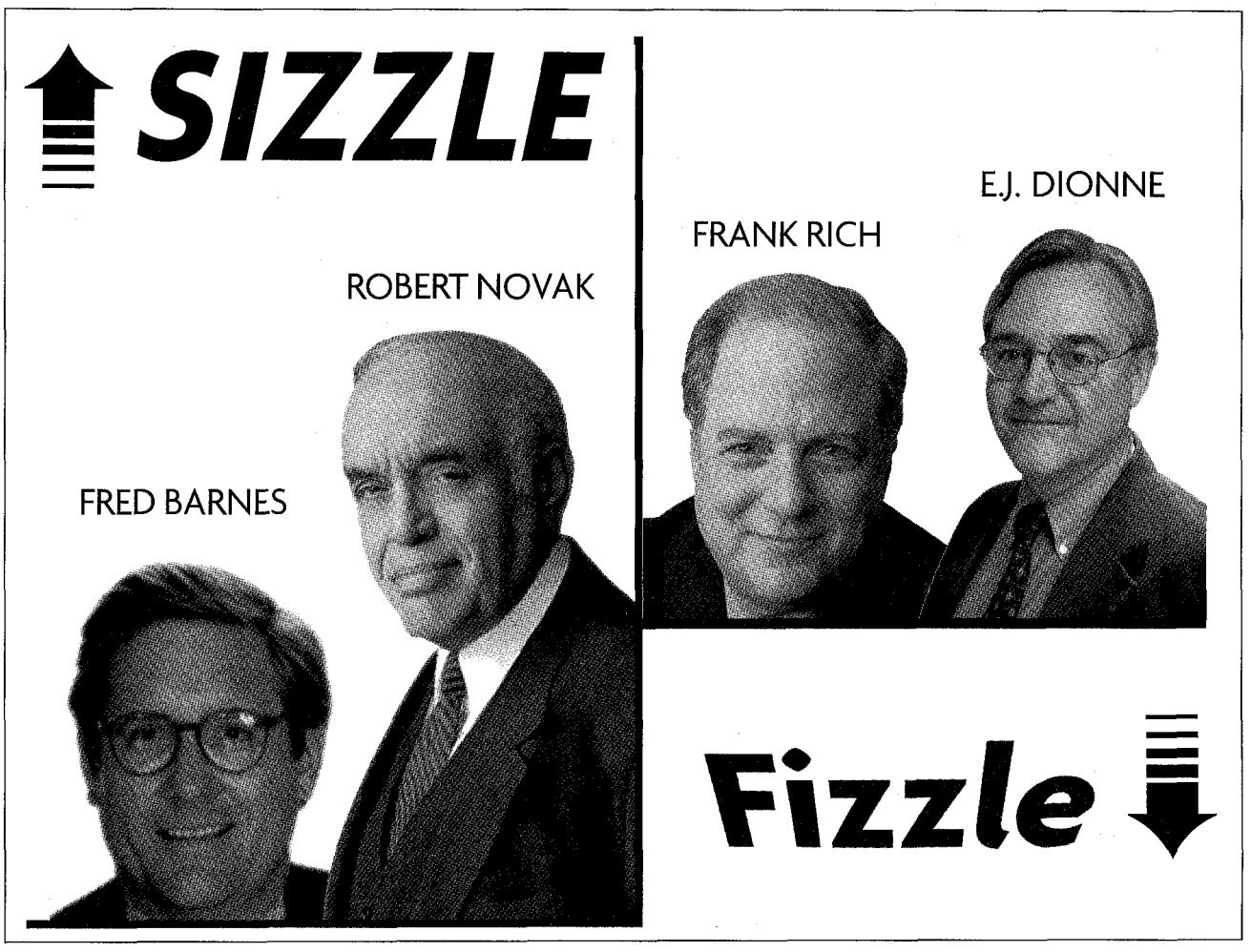
The Note is the *US Weekly* of political journalism.



creepy, and relentlessly effusive towards the media elite, The Note confirms the old adage that life really is like high school, with The Note filling the role of cheerleader-meets-yearbook editor, keeping tabs on where the cool kids are eating lunch, what they're wearing, and who's having the big party this weekend. In The Note's eyes, Beltway reporters are wonderfully talented, and everyone deserves a raise (e.g., "Will *New York Times* management recognize how great [reporter] Anne Kornblut is and act accordingly?")

No doubt this incestuous and over-the-top backslapping is meant to be taken somewhat tongue-in-cheek. (The Note does boast a sense of humor.) But after a while, the compliments—the egregious stroking of the press—become so pervasive that readers suspect The Note actually believes the press valentines, that *New York Times* columnist John Tierney is "successful and dashing," that his colleague Adam Nagourney is a "poet/historian," that former *U.S. News & World Report*'s Roger Simon flashes "brilliance, élan, and grace," that the work of *Time's* Mike Allen is "indescribably delicious," that *Newsday's* Glenn Thrush is "super savvy and smart," and that "*Time*'s [former managing editor] Jim Kelly is more powerful than all but 23 United States Senators." (If you were truly in the know, The Note implies, you'd know exactly which 23 they mean.)

Interestingly, although the tone of The Note is often too-cool-for-school, it never crosses over into actually being edgy. In fact, The Note doesn't mock conventional wisdom so much as idolize it. It's been dismissive of Democrats, reluctant to dwell on Bush's second-term collapse, eager to dwell on Terri Schiavo (at first), scornful of the Downing Street memo, uninterested in Iraq, nostalgic for Clinton-era scandals, fearful of Republican attacks, and generally awestruck by the Bush White House and its galaxy of all-stars. (According to The Note, Mike Gerson may just be the "greatest presidential speechwriter of all time.") "To read ABC News's 'The Note,'" wrote *The Nation's* Eric Alterman, "is to enter a world in which the President and his advisers are treated in a manner not unlike the way *US Weekly* treats 'Brad and Jen.' "

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To suggest The Note is enamored of GOP talking points is no exaggeration. From July 15, 2005: "Who wrote (and edited) the latest very awesome Republican talking points defending Rove that address the Novak situation and much more?" "Hats off to the White House communication team for handling the run-up and staging of this so well," The Note wrote glowingly of the White House decision to stage a meeting between members of the 9/11 Commission and Bush. As for a White House-led public relations blitz designed to improve the tattered image of Saudi Arabia, The Note cheered, "The scheme you came up with is so clever, we think it should be used as a case study in political campaign management schools."

In The Note's view, right-wing writers are reasoned, savvy, and powerful players. Indeed, the best way to get a read on Democrats is to pay attention to what conservative columnists are saying about them. Favorites include John Podhoretz at the *New York Post* (who labeled Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean a "lunatic leftist") and the "must-readable" *New York Times's* David Brooks, crowned by The Note as "the best columnist today writing about the Democratic Party" (Like Podhoretz, Brooks regularly ridicules Democrats.) Syndicated columnist Bob Novak and the *Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol and Fred Barnes are hailed by The Note as wise men whose work should not be missed.

Meanwhile, liberal counterparts to such partisans are either ignored or mocked. The *Times's* Frank Rich, arguably the most influential liberal columnist in the country, essentially does not exist in the pages of The Note. *The Washington Post's* E.J. Dionne, another potent and powerful voice on the left, should be read, according to The Note, simply to get "a window into what anti-Bush liberals are now all thinking inside their brains."

Bubblicious

All of this backslapping and cheerleading might just be a particularly cloying incarnation of the Beltway media bubble. But The Note doesn't just comment on the goings-on of politics; it also helps set the coverage. For at least the past year, The Note's judgment of what constitutes a major story and what doesn't has been alarmingly off.

Let's begin in March of 2005. The Note was all onboard for the Terri Schiavo saga, at one point linking to twenty separate Schiavo stories in one day. It also thought Republicans had themselves a winning issue with the right-to-life story: "The Republican leadership seems to have succeeded in framing the discourse around a moral question." At the same time, on March 21, The Note's parent, ABC News, released the findings from a Schiavo poll that found 67 percent of Americans thought elected officials were acting for political advantage rather than for the principles involved. The Note did its best to spin the results in favor of the White House, writing that the Republican intervention in the Schiavo matter had been met with "some public opposition." Only in the 2005 Beltway media environment could a controversial GOP initiative that was rejected by a broad cross-section of Americans—including 58 percent of self-identified conservative Republicans—be described as having been met with "some public opposition."

Two days later, detecting widespread mainstream criticism of the Republicans' heavy-handed intervention, The Note reported it was "perhaps the beginning of a *media* backlash." [Emphasis added.] When Bush's own poll numbers began an immediate decline in the wake of the Schiavo intervention—dropping seven points in seven days, according to one national survey—editors at The Note scratched their heads, declaring it was impossible to figure out "what exactly accounts for the President's droopy poll numbers."

The Note's tin-ear problem continued in September, amid the crisis of Hurricane Katrina. As Bush's job approval ratings plunged to new lows, The Note reported that the White House was winning the spin war: "Mr. Bush still hasn't found his footing or his voice on this story, but his side clearly won the last news cycle in raw political terms." That same day, though, pollster John Zogby reported that Bush's job approval rating had just hit the lowest mark of his entire presidency. The following week, The Note belatedly acknowledged that "living with [approval] ratings in the 40s is White House reality for now." The truth was, based on ABC's own polling, that the White House had been living with approval ratings in the 40s for five months. The post-Katrina news was that Bush had

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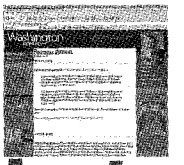
now you can keep up with the top stories that affect your world

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tumbled into the 30s. The Note was oblivious.

One month later, it also appeared to miss the Oct. 6 CBS poll that reported Bush's approval rating hitting a new low. On the two days after the poll was released, The Note linked to nearly one hundred must-reads, but not to the CBS report. When an astonishing October poll from NBC revealed that just 2 percent of African-Americans approved of Bush's job performance, The Note ignored that, too. (Months earlier, though, The Note had passed along the conventional wisdom that the Republican outreach effort to minority voters "will probably bear fruit.")

In November, *The Washington Post* reported its latest polling data, showing that the political advantages the Republican Party had built up since 9/11 regarding a whole host of issues—Iraq, Social Security, taxes, spending, and ethics—had completely evaporated. The poll also found that Democrats had opened a gaping 17-point lead in a poll that asked Americans which party they intended to vote for during the 2006 congressional elections. The Note, whose only real editorial mission is to chronicle the ups and downs of the two major parties, completely ignored the Post's report.

Wrapping up a year in which The Note seemed to be on a different news planet from the rest of the country, in March of 2006, the publication weighed in on the biggest political topic of the moment: the Dubai ports deal that was once again driving down the president's poll numbers. 72 percent of Americans said they were following the story on the news. The Note's comment on the controversy was this: "Port security: Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz (If you expected The Note to report on the meaning of the flap, the delay, the brouhaha, the whole thing—you expected wrong. Wake us when it's over.)" The Note had better things to talk about: "the sleep habits of [*Time* magazine's] Mike Allen."

Ginormously wrong

For all this deference to RNC talking points, The Note undoubtedly wishes to avoid being a tool of any party. It isn't FOX News, after all, and few of its staffers are right-wing partisans. Why, then, has The Note been so pliable?

Part of the explanation is specific to The Note: it's young, and, more than most media outlets, it's a product of the Bush era. Starting off as a purely internal rundown of the day's must-read stories for staffers at ABC's political news team, The Note first became public in January 2002. This was, of course, shortly after a national calamity, and criticism of the president was understandably muted. But such restraint may well have helped shape journalistic habits that would carry over into less exceptional times. Without any pre-Bushian institutional memory, The Note had no obvious alternative to itself.

The Note doesn't mock conventional wisdom so much as idolize it.

But most of the reasons for The Note's effective, if inadvertent, RNC shilling have to do with broader factors affecting the mainstream media in general. These include a consolidated media landscape in which owners are multinational corporations, many of which share interests with the GOP. Equally important has been a tight Republican grip on Congress and the White House, which, combined with hardball tactics, has allowed Republicans to intimidate the press corps. Adding to the chorus has been a deep-pocketed right-wing noise machine ready to pounce on any traces of "bias," which has caused the press to veer defensively to the right. (The Note frets whenever Rush Limbaugh takes issue with its work but scoffs whenever liberal critics do the same.) And journalists, despite their reputation for leftish politics, understand that advancing their careers will be difficult if they're perceived as being overtly left or contemptuous of Republicans. By contrast, being tough on Democrats ups their credibility and is rewarded.

By now, over a year into a second Bush term with almost three more to go, the consequences of media blindness and timidity—and the role of outlets like The Note in perpetuating it—have become clear enough. Counteracting it, however, is a different matter. Clearly, he-said, she-said conventions of reporting are inadequate when "he-said" is fact and "she-said" is fiction. And allowing the loudest partisans to set the parameters of debate can result in a very skewed view of left and right. Coming up with a remedy won't be easy. Meanwhile, though, journalists looking for guidance might want to cut down on The Note and think about whether it really plugs them in or simply perpetuates the problem. Sure, The Note is an indispensable guide to the chatter of the GOP. This has been interesting and helpful for the Gang of 500. It just hasn't done much good for the rest of us. ♦

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Fatal Inaction

There is a silver bullet for Africa's malaria epidemic. Why the Bush administration won't pull the trigger.

By Joshua Kurlantzick

Ndirande, Malawi, is one of the poorest neighborhoods in one of the poorest nations in the world. At a local health clinic, anxious mothers in brightly colored body wraps and head scarves shove their children's health records at the admissions counter. Inside, another 80 women wait for blood tests in a hot, tiny, windowless room, their babies suckling weakly at their breasts. Several babies lie unconscious or shaking on the ground. Others are so thin that their skeletal structures are plainly visible.

Twenty-three year-old Margaret cradles her 11-month-old son in her arms. When he contracted malaria last week, she gave him Fansidar, a commonly prescribed antimalarial drug here. "He's not getting better," she says. Her voice cracks. Next to her, 25-year-old Innocent, a tall woman with long, wiry hair, has bundled her one-year-old in a heavy sweater to quell the chills that shake his small body. He's had malaria twice in the past two months, and also took Fansidar, with little effect. A physician's assistant moves from mother to mother, distributing pills that he knows are essentially worthless. Most of the children in this room have had malaria before, and most will get it again: An African child dies of malaria nearly every 30 seconds.

Stories about Africa frequently hew to a familiar script: narratives of intractable tragedies ignored by the world with no feasible solutions in sight. This isn't one of those stories. Roger Bate, a malaria-policy expert at the American Enterprise Institute, calls malaria probably the most obviously preventable serious disease in Africa. Although the parasite has grown resistant to drugs that once tamed the disease—including the Fansidar distributed in the Ndirande clinic—it's easily treatable with a powerful drug called artemisinin. Nor has malaria escaped political attention. In 1998, Roll Back Malaria (an alliance of international organizations, including the World Bank and the United Nations) launched a campaign to halve global malaria deaths by 2010. Last year, President Bush called for a "broad, aggressive campaign" to cut malaria deaths in Africa by half—an effort which, he declared, "our nation is prepared to lead."

Yet leadership has been noticeably absent from Washington's main aid-givers: the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank. Both agencies have questioned artemisinin's effectiveness in the past, and squandered large portions of their malaria budgets. Meanwhile, malaria death rates have not decreased. Although some thoughtful conservatives like Sen. Sam Brownback have pushed USAID hard to address this entirely solvable problem, other conservatives have diverted reform energies by turning the issue into a partisan debate about environmental regulations. And the malaria crisis has received little tangible attention from the man who promised that "aggressive campaign" to fight it. After the president reaped considerable public praise for his declaration of support for Africa, he's shown less inclination to actually deliver the help that he promised.

ACT up

Not that long ago, developed countries viscerally understood the connection between malaria and their own national health. Until the mid-20th century, the disease was a scourge of nearly every continent. The parasite, which travels from mosquitoes to humans, then through human blood to the liver, triggers fevers, nausea, and sometimes, deadly comas. Tellingly, major advances in treatment have often been spurred by economic ambitions. Malaria-control efforts were seen as crucial to the development of the American South, and became a linchpin of FDR's Tennessee Valley Authority Project, leading to the almost total

Joshua Kurlantzick is special correspondent for *The New Republic* and a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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eradication of the disease here by the late 1940s. But the effective disappearance of the disease from the developed world means that malaria, unlike HIV, lacks a vocal or wealthy Western constituency to push for the production of new drugs.

For a while, no new treatments were needed. Beginning in the 1950s, chloroquine halted malaria's march in Africa and Asia. But by the 1980s, the parasite had become resistant to the drug on both continents. The World Health Organization (WHO) termed chloroquine "useless"; other cheap drugs like Fansidar also lost their effectiveness. Now, at least 300 million cases of malaria occur annually. Ninety percent of the resulting deaths occur in Africa where the climate is particularly hospitable to mosquitoes. Severe epidemics are becoming common (almost half of Burundi's population of 6.5 million contracted malaria in 2001), and the number of children killed by the disease is rising. Malaria paralyzes economies too: recurring bouts keep children from school and adults from work. The disease is estimated to cost Africa as much as $12 billion in lost gross domestic product each year.

In the 1980s, a British researcher named Nick White helped develop the drug artemisinin, derived from a wormwood plant grown in southern China. White found that when artemisinin is combined with other drugs to form artemisinin-based combination therapy, or ACT, it cleared malaria from the blood in 90 percent of the cases. Clinics on the Thai-Burmese border were among the first in the world to use this remedy. In 2000, I visited one such clinic amid a thick, scrubby forest. Though the woods teemed with mosquitoes, only two women lay in the hut with their feverish children; as they played with their babies, they seemed convinced the kids would get better. They were right. By the end of the day, the children were running around the hut, and by nightfall, their mothers were able to take them home.

Using drugs manufactured in China and India, other Asian nations imitated White's success. Vietnam used ACT to slash infection rates by more than 97 percent in the 1990s. In 1999, prominent infectious disease specialists penned an article in the prestigious British medical journal, *The Lancet*, calling for a rapid rollout of artemisinins in Africa. The following year, South Africa introduced an ACT called Coartem, manufactured by the Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis. Twelve months later, the number of cases in the South African province of KwaZulu Natal had plunged by almost 80 percent. In 2001 the World Health Organization recommended that all countries where malaria is resistant to older drugs should switch to ACT.

Most African nations accept that ACT should be their primary weapon in the war on malaria. At the central hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital, Dr. Peter Kazembe's office is crammed with malaria studies and antiquated laptops that run malaria control models; his window overlooks a courtyard where young mothers wait anxiously for news of their sick children. (Virtually the entire population of Malawi is vulnerable to the disease.) As a pediatrician and longtime member of a government advisory committee on malaria control, Kazembe understands ACT's benefits. But Malawi, like most African countries, hasn't adopted ACT, partly because of the expense of the drugs. Kazembe considers his predicament: He knows exactly how to treat his patients, but he still can't help them. He laughs wryly, then excuses himself to leave for a funeral. "We spend so much time going to these things," he says.

Saving lives vs. the Redskins

The cost of providing ACTs for the world's malaria sufferers is negligible by the standards of the rich world. For once, big pharma isn't the villain here. Novartis, which controls most of the ACT market, is willing to produce Coartem at cost. However, it won't boost production without guaranteed orders, according to people familiar with its operations. Until recently, donors couldn't purchase generics instead because, according to Médecins Sans Frontières, WHO has been slow to grant ACT produced in places like India the necessary pre-qualification status; under pressure, the WHO has started to step up pre-qualification. Without an increased supply, the price of artemisinin drugs is unlikely to fall. At the moment, the drugs run to about $2.50 per treatment, more than 20 times the cost of chloroquine, and well out of reach of the villagers in Malawi, for instance, where the average income is about 50 cents per day.

In 2004, the Institute of Medicine, a U.S. government scientific advisory body, proposed a global ACT subsidy to remedy this problem. The plan would require donor countries and multinational agencies to reserve up to $500 million to buy ACTs from companies like Novartis. (By comparison, $500 million is less than half the value of the Washington Redskins.) That way, Novartis and others could boost production knowing that orders were certain. The Institute noted that the subsidy would make ACTs available to all malaria sufferers for the same price as chloroquine—about 10 cents per treatment—and would actually stem future demand for anti-malarials: Unlike HIV treatments, which require long-term prescriptions of complicated antiretroviral drugs, ACT act rapidly and don't have to be taken indefinitely.

Dr. Francisco Saute is the deputy director of malaria control in Mozambique, which has one of Africa's highest malaria death rates. (One in every hundred Mozambican children dies from the disease.) A short man with a round face and a pug nose, Saute, who trained at elite institutions in Spain and Britain, shifts rapidly from English to Portuguese to Spanish. His cell phones trill constantly; he sweats rivulets out the front of

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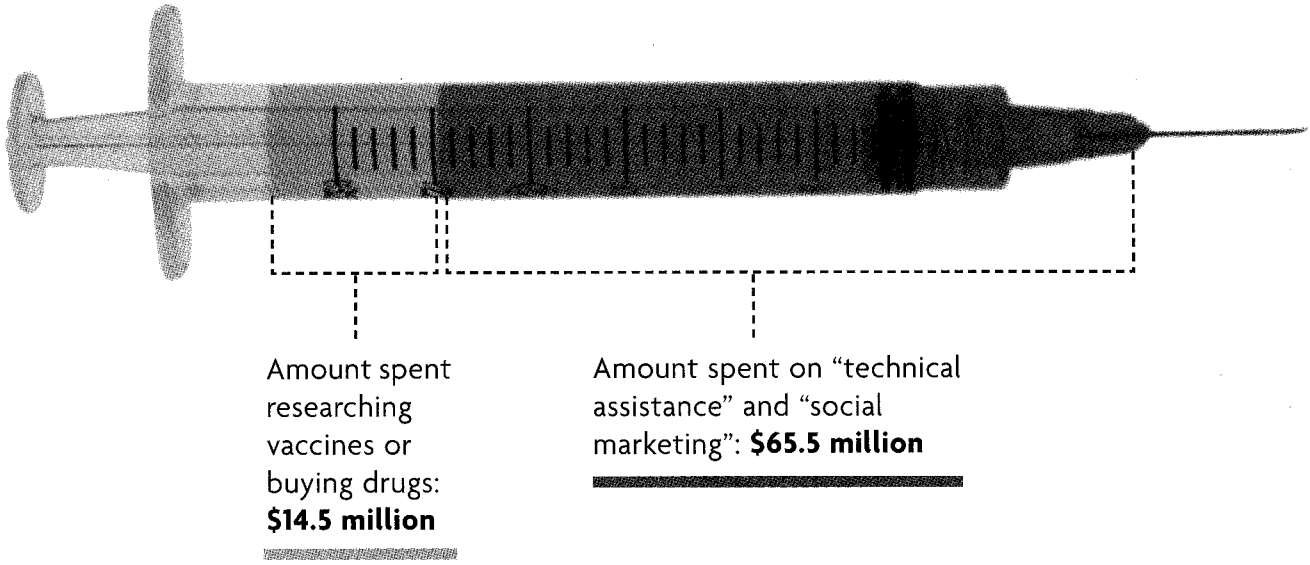
HOW USAID SPENDS ITS MALARIA MONEY

Total malaria budget for 2004: $80 million



his open-necked shirt. As he rushes between ten-minute meetings in the bowels of Mozambique's dilapidated, water-stained health ministry, he emits a stream of complaints. Some international health agencies, pressured by well-meaning activists, are pushing Mozambique to change its entire malaria infrastructure and buy artemisinins now—but won't provide the money to make the drugs affordable, he says. Mozambique did try to adopt ACT in 2004, with disastrous results when a surge in demand for Novartis caused a global shortage. One infectious disease doctor told me that some rural parts of Mozambique now have no malaria medications at all. "The international community pushed them to go to artemisinins, but with no way to pay for it," he says. Ramanan Laxminarayan, a malaria expert at the nonprofit Resources for the Future, believes that this situation could rapidly be solved if the United States threw its weight behind the subsidy. "African countries try to do what USAID wants them to do," he says. "It wouldn't take much time to get up and running once there is political will."

Africans can tell time, too

USAID was devised in 1961 as a tool in the Cold War. When that conflict ended, the agency faced fierce challenges to its relevance from conservative firebrands like Sen. Jesse Helms. Because of this pressure, in the 1990s, USAID's budget was slashed repeatedly and so was its staff—37 percent of the agency's staffers left or were not replaced. As a result, according to a report by AEI's Roger Bate, USAID became "largely a contracting organization." But by relying on American contractors to fulfill many of its mandates, USAID became far less accountable—as evidenced by its troubled malaria program.

USAID's malaria budget increased from $22 million in 1998 to $90 million by 2005. Last year, members of Congress held hearings to determine what that

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money had produced. The results weren't pretty. After interrogations from Sen. Tom Coburn and others, it emerged that in fiscal year 2004, USAID spent just 5 percent of its malaria budget on antimalarial drugs. The rest of the budget went to various "technical assistance" projects (such as a $65 million program for "social marketing" of mosquito nets to impoverished Africans), as well as salaries of U.S. consultants, travel expenses, training, and other services provided by American contractors. "We spent most of our money telling people how to use the cheap and effective tools to fight malaria," said Coburn at another hearing this January, "and very little money actually providing them those tools and very little money actually saving lives." Coburn has also questioned why the U.S. sinks its malaria cash into USAID, instead of supporting the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the major international organization that finances the purchase of malaria drugs. Bate concludes that most of USAID's malaria funds "either never left the United States ... or funded the employment of U.S. citizens." Former USAID head Andrew Natsios admitted in 2003 that the organization has relied on contractors, but lacks the resources to oversee them: "We don't have enough officers to do the work," he told *Government Executive* magazine.

According to USAID's own internal reporting, as much as 80 percent of its total budget goes to American goods and American contractors. Disturbingly, it's almost impossible to know whether these contractors provide value for money, as the agency is notoriously intransigent when it comes to evaluating its effectiveness. In 2000, economist Ruben Berrios found that USAID's bidding procedures were woefully uncompetitive, relying heavily on a small pool of contractors. The agency is also generally reluctant to release information on its work (dealing with the Pentagon is far easier). Bate points out that contractors have little incentive to actually solve the problems they're supposed to address, as successful advice would ultimately render them jobless.

But although USAID's inept response to malaria can partly be blamed on these institutional defects, even more troubling is the agency's apparent ambivalence towards ACT. Internal documents obtained by *The Washington Monthly* suggest that well after leading malaria experts recommended the benefits of ACT in *The Lancet*, USAID was still privately discouraging their use. "Let's not argue for ... artemisinin therapy right now," reads a message from a 2001 email exchange between two of the agency's malaria specialists. Another message from 2003 suggests that the treatment should still be seriously debated—two years after the World Health Organization recommended a switch to artemisinins for countries where resistance had developed to older drugs. A 2004 *Lancet* article by 13 malaria specialists noted that countries that sought to switch to ACT were "forcefully pressured out of it" by the U.S. The resulting outcry forced USAID to declare support for ACT. In a meeting at USAID, agency disease experts told me that the organization had initially harbored concerns that countries would switch to ACT too quickly, before necessary infrastructure was in place. However, they said they recognized the importance of the powerful new treatment.

Some critics believe USAID had shunned artemisinin because of deep-seated doubts that Africans can handle complex treatments. In 2001, Natsios told a House committee hearing on HIV/AIDS that Africans "do not know what watches and clocks are." (Studies have shown that African patients correctly follow HIV drug regimens, which are more complicated than artemisinin combinations.) And although USAID commissioned the Institute of Medicine study that proposed subsidizing ACT, it has

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shown little inclination to support the plan. When I asked Peter Bloland of the Centers for Disease Control whether he'd seen the political will from Washington to push for the subsidy, he answered simply, "no."

Green herring

Oddly, malaria has become something of a conservative *cause celebre* in recent years. Sen. Brownback has become a dedicated advocate for combating the disease. At congressional hearings, he and fellow Republican Sen. Coburn display an impressive knowledge of the crisis and the deficiencies of USAID's response. However, apart from a few such thoughtful exceptions, conservative energies have mostly been focused on another supposed solution: the insecticide DDT.

DDT, which helps kill malarial mosquitoes, was sprayed in America to eradicate malaria. But Rachel Carson's vivid portrayal of the horrors wrought by the chemical in her seminal book *Silent Spring* caused DDT to be banned in 1972, and helped launch the modern environmental movement. For some conservatives, malaria policy has now become an unlikely tool in the anti-environmentalist backlash. *The Weekly Standard*, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, and *National Review* have dedicated more than 10 editorials in recent years touting the benefits of DDT (although some conservatives like Bate, Brownback, and Coburn do advocate both DDT and ACT). At malaria hearings for the Senate Foreign Relations committee, Republican members have repeatedly asked why the United States doesn't promote DDT in malaria-stricken nations.

This preoccupation with DDT, however, is largely a distraction. Environmental leaders now agree that the pesticide should be used to combat malaria; few nations in Africa ban it; and USAID has agreed to spray DDT in countries like Ethiopia and Mozambique. What's more, DDT is no silver bullet. Malaria experts agree that it reduces transmission, but emphasize that it must be combined with other interventions, including ACT. The furor over DDT has undoubtedly hampered efforts to provide better access to antimalarial drugs. When another malaria expert met with Senate staffers to discuss malaria in 2004 and 2005, they badgered him about DDT. "I tried to explain the reality," he says, "and people in the U.S. say 'That's not what I was told.'" "DDT has become a fetish," adds Allan Schapira of WHO. "You have people advocating DDT as if it's the only insecticide that works against malaria, as if DDT would solve all problems, which is obviously absolutely unrealistic."

Ultimately, despite the efforts of lawmakers like Brownback, meaningful action on malaria needs White House support. President Bush has certainly been generous with his rhetoric. Last year, he pledged $1.2 billion to the cause, challenging the world to move past "empty symbolism and discredited policies." However, Rep. Tom Lantos pointed out that for the first year, this sum didn't actually include any new money—it simply reallocated previously budgeted funds.

Stiffed by the World Bank

American inaction on ACT has fed a deeper malaise among both international and private institutions and private institutions that deal with malaria—and which tend to be heavily influenced by U.S policy and funding. Last year, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria found itself $300 million short of the money it had planned to spend on drugs. President Bush had only requested $200 million for the Global Fund, less than half of what Congress had provided the previous year. But perhaps the most alarming example is the World Bank, which, according to a report in *The Lancet* this year, has failed to fulfill a 2000 promise to boost funding for malaria control. Instead, *The Lancet* found that the Bank funded obsolete drugs, downsized its malaria staff, and faked its financial accounts, possibly to mask mistakes. "No commercial high-street bank could keep such imprecise accounts for its clients, without running a serious risk of civil or criminal illegality," *The Lancet* concluded.

Some of the few hopeful signs are emerging from the private sector. In May 2005, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledged $35 million to a comprehensive anti-malaria pilot project in Zambia. The project combines all the possible antimalarial weapon—insecticides, bed nets, and ACT. The foundation also appears willing to fund a study to consider exactly how to deliver the global ACT subsidy; several major donor agencies including UNICEF and WHO are discussing how to make the subsidy work. Stung by congressional criticism, USAID also vowed in January to mend its ways (this year it intends to spend half of its malaria budget on drugs, nets and spraying). It has also said that it is rebuilding its staff to become less reliant on contractors. Whether these initiatives will bear fruit, or simply go the way of numerous other lofty goals, remains to be seen.

At Ndirande, a new crowd of children and mothers sits on the floor outside the doctor's office. The room echoes with the wails of skeletal babies. More worrisomely, some of the children are eerily silent. Meria cradles her baby daughter, who's been coughing up blood and vomiting repeatedly. Next to her, Agnes, a 46-year-old with a heavily-creased face who wears a headscarf decorated with brightly-colored mangoes, stares at her three-year-old son. He's not moving at all. "That boy has had malaria every month, and today he's having the same symptoms as before," Agnes says. "I'm worried he'll have this problem every month, forever." ♦

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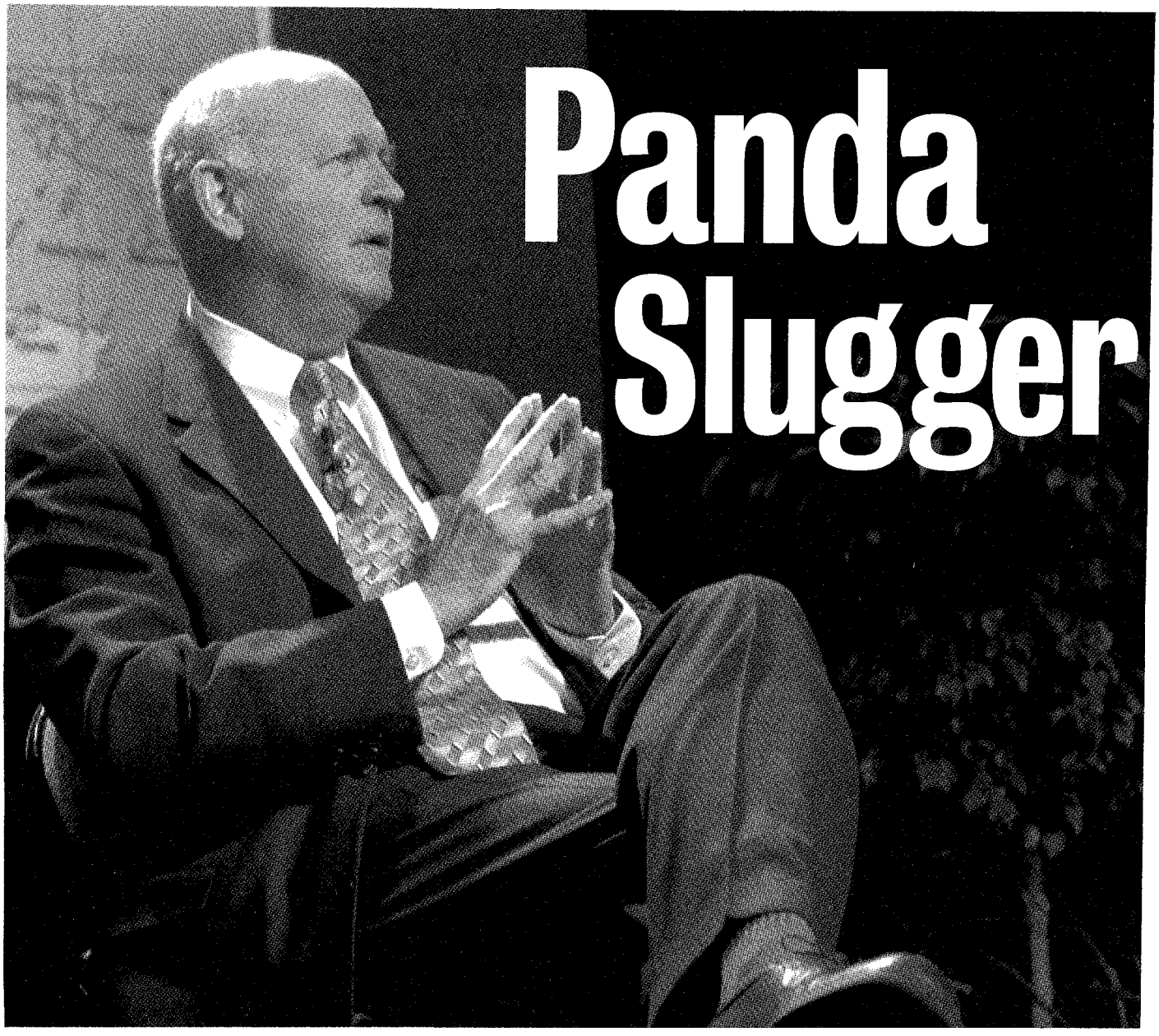

Panda Slugger

The dubious scholarship of Michael Pillsbury, the China hawk with Rumsfeld's ear.

By Soyoung Ho

In May 2002, ten months before he became president of China, Hu Jintao visited Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon. The meeting, as then-Vice President Hu saw it, had gone well. Routine U.S.-Chinese military-to-military contacts, which had been suspended since 2001 after a tense standoff over a damaged U.S. spy plane, were to be renewed. China's Xinhua news agency quickly put out a headline announcing the thaw: "Chinese vice-president, U.S. defense secretary agree to resume military exchanges."

But there was a problem. According to the Pentagon, no such consensus had been reached. Instead, the two sides had merely agreed that the possibility of such exchanges would be "revisited."

The mix-up, as it turned out, had a likely explanation. According to *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, Rumsfeld, in a characteristic interdepartmental snub, had barred the State Department's interpreter from the meeting. The man on whose language skills Rumsfeld had instead relied was not a professional interpreter but a Pentagon advisor and longtime Washington operator named Michael Pillsbury. With a proficiency (up to a

is a *Washington Monthly* assistant editor.

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point) in Mandarin, a doctorate in political science from Columbia University, and three decades of experience in dealing with the Chinese military, Pillsbury has emerged as a Defense Department favorite. That he may inadvertently have caused Hu to leave Washington with an overly conciliatory picture was also ironic: Pillsbury is one of Washington's foremost China hawks, consistently warning that Beijing represents a more serious and rapidly growing military threat than other China experts believe.

The Wall Street Journal took notice of Pillsbury last year in a front-page story that described him as "one of the Pentagon's most influential advisers on China, with a direct line to many of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's top aides." The story observed that China, too, has been "keeping tabs on Mr. Pillsbury." For good reason: Thanks in part to Pillsbury's influence, the Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR — the blueprint for future defense strategy and spending—identifies China as the nation with "the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States." And the Pentagon's most recent annual report to Congress on China's military contains passages that appear to be lifted directly out of Pillsbury's writings, including warnings of "asymmetric programs" in the works. This can get expensive. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported the "the Pentagon now cites China as justification for a range of proposed procurements, most notably a new, multibillion-dollar long-range bomber program."

While Pillsbury has achieved prominence within the Defense Secretary's office, many defense experts within the military, government agencies, and universities reject his scholarship as tendentious at best, and their professional distaste is heightened by personal dislike. "Brilliant" and "charming" are words frequently used by acquaintances to describe Pillsbury, but so are "combative," "conspiratorial," and "ruthless." His career has been one of numerous short-lived jobs, at least three dismissals, and a revoked security clearance.

For hardliners in the Bush administration, however, having a combative, conspiratorial, or ruthless personality isn't exactly a drawback. Rather, it is seen as a desirable quality in an administration that has been in an almost constant state of war with expert consensus, which it sees as a fortress of liberal bias and as a hindrance to bold action. Still, even if the White House might prefer to operate solely on instinct, administration officials need experts inside and outside of government to help them set strategy, to lace their speeches with supportive factoids, to win arguments in inner-agency battles with opponents, to produce studies purportedly showing that all the other experts are wrong ("Carbon dioxide: They call it pollution. We call it life."), and to speak to journalists looking for "both sides" of a debate.

Prior to the invasion of Iraq, eccentric experts on the Middle East dominated administration thinking, but most are now back on the outside of policy. "The Middle East is just a blip," explained a 2005 *Atlantic Monthly* article headlined "How We Would Fight China" by Robert D. Kaplan. China is the new long-term game, and Pillsbury is the neocons' successor, the latest Cassandra with Rumsfeld's ear. Unfortunately, this is a White House with an unenviable record of picking its Cassandras. The right ones (Eric Shinseki) have often been ignored in favor of the wrong ones (Ahmed Chalabi). And the consequences have been serious. But which Cassandra is Michael Pillsbury?

Out-hawking the hawks

In person, Pillsbury, a blue-eyed, consciously polished figure in his early sixties, is a combination of charm and caginess. At a recent meeting at a Corner Bakery in downtown Washington, D.C., he sipped lowfat milk and genially fended off questions about his work. He attributes negative press such as the story about his mistranslation between Rumsfeld and Hu to rumors spread by "panda huggers" (a pejorative term for those who take a more benign view of Beijing). "I try to focus on a topic that no one focuses on," he says, contrasting himself to his peers. "It's mainly the future, more than five years ahead, sometimes 10 years ahead."

Actually, scores of China experts within the military, the intelligence community, and the academy devote their lives precisely to assessing the Chinese military and its possible impact on U.S. interests over the next five or 10 years. Nearly all have arrived at the same conclusion: that China's military is nowhere close to being a credible threat to the United States or its interests.

China's military technology is widely considered to be about 20 years behind that of the United States, and its defense expenditures (even if its official numbers are tripled, which some say must be done to capture China's full investment) are less than a fifth of those of the United States, which spends nearly half a trillion dollars per year. The defense budgets of South Korea and Japan are each bigger than that of China, too. To be sure, China, thanks to its growing economic might, has been modernizing its armed forces rapidly. But so has the United States, which currently spends $70 billion per year on defense R&D alone (higher than the defense R&D budgets of the rest of the world combined). As Admiral William Fallon, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, recently told *The Wall Street Journal*, "Technologically, we are far and away more sophisticated than they [the Chinese] are, and they know it."

If China were to have any serious capacity to project power beyond its shores, it would need what any great power has: aircraft carriers. As Fred Kaplan points out in *Slate*, though, China has only two (used ones purchased from the U.S.S.R.), which are being used not as weapons platforms but, in the Pentagon's own words, as "floating military theme parks." Some experts think that China

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might have one combat-ready carrier by 2015.

When assessing threats, security experts look not only at capacity but also at intent. (Great Britain could incinerate U.S. cities with nuclear weapons, for example, but this has cost us little sleep.) Here, the debate becomes more heated. All agree that China harbors considerable nationalist sentiment, has its eyes on Taiwan, and has shown a willingness to behave mercilessly towards its dissidents, but they disagree over whether this translates into plans to challenge or outdo the United States militarily. Some, such as Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, take a sanguine view widely shared within the uniformed military. "There are lots of countries in the world that have the capacity to wage war," Pace said in a 2005 press conference. "Very few have the intent to do so. And, clearly, we have a complex but good relationship with China. So there's absolutely no reason for us to believe there's any intent on their part." Some take a darker view. And many simply say there's no telling what China hopes to do and, for now, little point in trying. Many things can happen in twenty years. China may become the next Soviet Union. Or its economy might collapse. Or it might become a democracy. Convenient as it may be to lock in one's enemies in advance, the world doesn't work that way.

The debate over intent has led to different policy-making recommendations. Experts advocating a tougher stance argue that China is more likely to restrain itself in the decades ahead in response to overwhelming displays of force today. To that end, they support increased deployments of forces to the Pacific and more spending on weapons. They also press for a "hedging strategy" of building alliances with China's neighbors, such as Japan and India, should relations with the Middle Kingdom go sour. This, for the most part, has been the approach of the Bush administration.

Those counseling restraint argue that China already has a keen sense of U.S. military superiority. An overtly aggressive posture against a potential long-term threat, they say, will only convince China to become hostile and make it less likely to cooperate on the real, immediate threats posed by Iran and North Korea. Many also warn against using China as an excuse to spend precious defense dollars on weapons we may not need, especially since the United States is, at least indirectly, borrowing money to build them from the Chinese.

On this spectrum of opinion, Pillsbury dwells on the far-hawkish end. Where others view China's intentions as complicated, Pillsbury says that Beijing views the United States as an "inevitable foe." ("He makes simple what is not simple," says Mark Pratt, a former State Department official who has known Pillsbury for over 30 years.) Where others debate the merits of hedging, Pillsbury feels that things haven't gone far enough. "The U.S. can do much more to hedge in the next few years if the Chinese do not end their excessive military secrecy and begin to reassure their neighbors," he recently told *The Wall Street Journal*. And where nearly everyone agrees that China is far behind the United States in military capacity, Pillsbury has been among the first, and the few, to argue that Beijing is preparing for an asymmetric military conflict with the United States in which it would draw on secret "assassin's mace" weapons. The term "assassin's mace," more commonly translated as "trump card" (*shashoujian*) is, according to Pillsbury, integral to a Chinese notion of "inferior defeats superior." (The Pentagon's most recent annual report to Congress on China's military from May 2006 includes the term, mentioning Chinese efforts to exploit "perceived vulnerabilities of potential opponents—so-called Assassin's Mace [sha shou jian] programs.") An "assassin's mace" might take the form of a computer application, for instance, that would take over an enemy information system, rendering a foe the victim of his own dependence on technology. In Pillsbury's telling, China intends to leapfrog ahead in battle readiness by using assassin's-mace weapons to find breaches in U.S. armor. Moreover, he implies, they could be ready at any time.

Broken China

Pillsbury wasn't always a hardliner on China. As an undergraduate at Stanford in the 1960s, he was so taken with Chinese culture that he decided to make a career of it. In the 1970s, he enrolled as a graduate student at Columbia University and took a job at the Rand Corporation. His first moment of fame would come in 1975, when he published an article in *Foreign Policy* suggesting that China and the U.S. establish military-to-military relations as a counter to the Soviet Union. Many old-school anti-communists objected, but then-Governor Ronald Reagan was among those who were impressed. The Gipper even sent Pillsbury a handwritten letter of praise.

In 1978, Pillsbury went into government, taking a job as a Republican staff assistant to the Senate Budget Committee. He soon found allies among the Senate's more conservative members, such as Jesse Helms and Orrin Hatch, but he also made enemies. Prior to his death this year, John Carbaugh, a former Senate staffer, told *The Washington Monthly* that he had been investigated for a leak in 1980 that had actually come from Pillsbury. "He went after me," said Carbaugh. "I was just blind-sided." (Pillsbury denies the story.)

Holding on to employment was something else. His first job ended after only five months, when Pillsbury traveled to Japan and told his hosts that the U.S. ambassador was "not in touch" with Congress. ("Not only did I not say it, but I took written notes at every meeting," Pillsbury complained to AP after his firing.) By 1981, Pillsbury had managed to secure a spot as acting director of the Arms Control and

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Disarmament Agency (ACDA), but this post, too, lasted only a few months. (A Reagan official told the trade journal *Aviation Week & Space Technology* that Pillsbury had been a "loose cannon" who'd acted "contrary to Administration policy.") In 1986, Pillsbury achieved his most prominent dismissal yet, when he was let go as assistant undersecretary of defense for leaking to reporters that the administration had begun to supply the resistance in Afghanistan and Angola with Stinger missiles. (Pillsbury denied the allegations.)

But Pillsbury kept coming back, amassing a record for recovery that would exhaust even the most diligent phoenix. Weeks after his 1986 firing, he was back working for four senators—Orrin Hatch, Jesse Helms, Gordon J. Humphrey, and Chic Hecht—as an advisor on foreign-policy issues.

The meltdown of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International in 1991 should probably have ended Pillsbury's career. According to a report released by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1992, he had developed close ties to BCCI frontman Mohammed Hammoud, a Lebanese Shi'ite millionaire, meeting with him "ten to twenty times" in cities around the world and accepting money from him. The report explained:

> According to Pillsbury, Hammoud paid him an advance to coauthor a scholarly text about the Shi'ites...However, Pillsbury refused to disclose the amount he had been paid by Hammoud, and when the payment was made. Pillsbury argued that these facts were irrelevant since he ultimately returned the money, although he refused to specify when that occurred. Pillsbury stated that his expenses had never been paid by either Hammoud or BCCI. However, these statements are contradicted by notes taken by BCCI's lawyer ...

Pillsbury has identified a secret program that, by all indications, is literally no more than a figure of speech.

The report also found that Pillsbury, when BCCI began to totter, had written to the public relations firm of Hill and Knowlton "offering to be of assistance to BCCI in its public relations efforts."

By the late 1990s, though, BCCI was a dim memory, and Pillsbury a changed man—at least as far as China was concerned. A Sinophile no more, Pillsbury spoke of having been shocked by the Tiananmen killings in 1989 and appalled by anti-American sentiment among Chinese officials. His timing was good. Anti-China sentiment was running high in Washington, with Republican lawmakers depicting the White House as soft on Beijing and Regnery Publishing releasing books like *Year of the Rat: How Bill Clinton Compromised American Security for Chinese Money*. For Pillsbury, who'd spent the Clinton years bouncing in relative obscurity as a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council of the United States and as an associate fellow at the National Defense University, knowing something about China represented a way to get back in the game.

Soon, he had emerged as part of an unofficial but powerful Washington group called the Blue Team. Composed of leading anti-China conservatives, the Blue Team (the name comes from a common code designation, red versus blue, for the sides in war games) was dedicated to persuading lawmakers on the Hill to take a harder line against China. And, meanwhile, Pillsbury, with the backing of long-time mentor Andrew Marshall, head of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, released two books: *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, in 1997, and *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, in 2000. They painted a picture of a self-confident China eagerly anticipating the decline of U.S.

"To make incorrect judgments by sending disinformation"

In Pillsbury's view, the crucial attribute that separates him from his peers is an ability to think farther ahead. "What you find with my colleagues is they say they don't need to worry about the future," he says.

Some of Pillsbury's supporters agree. "In Washington, at times, people are risk-averse and have groupthink," says Randall Schriver, an East Asia specialist at the State Department until 2005. "But Pillsbury feels unbounded by conventional thinking. He thinks long-term, strategically." Derek Leebaert, professor in the government department at Georgetown University, calls Pillsbury "one of the few serious scholars in national security," adding that many others "at the top are barely qualified."

But the true difference between most experts and Michael Pillsbury appears to lie somewhere else: namely, in the scholarship. With the exception of *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, which is a straightforward compilation of translated essays, Pillsbury's work over the past decade has become increasingly speculative and dubious. In particular, a close examination of his writings reveals a troubling approach to

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evidence and primary sources.

A case in point is Pillsbury's paper "China's Military Strategy Toward the U.S.: A View from Open Sources" from November of 2001. The piece names numerous Chinese military writings, including an article entitled "Twenty-first Century Naval Warfare" by Naval Captain Shen Zhongchang, Naval Lieutenant Commander Zhang Haiying, and Naval Lieutenant Zhou Xinsheng of the Chinese Navy Research Institute. According to Pillsbury, the article is written to show "how China could adopt several asymmetrical approaches to defeating a larger and more powerful navy," and one of them "will be for China to **attack American naval command and information systems.**" (Underlined boldface Pillsbury's.)

But Pillsbury's footnotes lead to an essay that never discusses how China fits into future naval warfare, much less any sort of hypothetical attack on the United States. (The essay even appears in Pillsbury's 1997 book, translated into English.)

Later in his report, Pillsbury takes on another essay by the same authors and does something similar:

> In an article entitled "The Military Revolution in Naval Warfare," Captain Shen Zhongchang and his co-authors list new technologies that will contribute to the defeat of the United States. ... The American system may not be so safe from attack.

But the original essay makes no reference to how China might defeat the United States. China, in fact, is never mentioned once in the essay, nor is the concept of defeating the United States.

Asked about these characterizations, Pillsbury said that, in China, "There seems to be a taboo from directly saying the United States. And these people use euphemism." If that's the inference, then why doesn't the paper explain this? "Because sometimes when I turn in my first draft, somebody will say, 'Be specific. Say what you mean.'"

Pillsbury also takes dramatic liberties with his translations. At one point in *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, for example, Pillsbury refers to an essay by one General Pan Junfeng that discusses the significance of the IT revolution for future warfare. He cites three sentences, placing them in direct quotation marks: "We can make the enemy's command centers not work by changing their data system. We can cause the enemy's headquarters to make incorrect judgments by sending disinformation. We can dominate the enemy's banking system and even its entire social order."

But Pan's piece is worded quite differently. The original sentences—there are actually four, not three—appear in a section discussing the limitations of technological superiority, and they're introduced by a topic sentence discussing how using computers to wage war might allow one side to cause the opposing side (no nationalities are named) "to sink into an information disaster." Two Chinese speakers translating directly from a summer 1996 issue of *China Military Science* came up with nearly identical translations that read as follows:

> For example, altering relevant data in the enemy's computer system can cause his command centers and weapons systems to be flooded with mistaken information and thereby unable to function normally. Pouring false intelligence into the enemy's computer network can cause his command office to make mistaken decisions, thereby bringing about faults in strategic policy. Issuing false orders to the enemy's army through the enemy's computer system can cause the enemy army to take orders from oneself and military movements to sink into confusion. Using the computer system to destroy the enemy country's bank accounts can sow confusion in the enemy country's financial and economic order, causing social unrest, and so forth.

Looking back at Pillsbury's version of the above passage, then, it's apparent that he's taken Pan's original sentences and added a non-existent "we," thereby ascribing implicit nationalities to the parties where none is named, and has truncated the original sentences beyond normal conventions of translation.

Shown the different translations, Pillsbury, responding in an email, said, "I do not ascribe nationalities to the parties. [A]nd I remind you that it is a photo caption. I had no editorial control over the photo captions." But the photo caption is taken directly from a passage in the body of the book. Pillsbury also claimed to have met personally with General Pan and to have been told "how to interpret his article." But Pillsbury did not explain why he chose to write his interpretation directly into passages that appear in quotation marks.

The "photo caption" of General Pan, meanwhile, did not go unnoticed by the press. It was quoted, for instance, in a *Washington Times* article, "Pentagon Study Finds China Preparing for War with U.S.," which used it to show that "China also plans electronic attacks on computer networks."

And what about the "Assassin's Mace," one of Pillsbury's major preoccupations? Here, Pillsbury appears to have taken a common Chinese term, *shashoujian*, and decided, based on his own unfamiliarity with it ("I first saw this unusual term in...1995," he writes in a 2003 article) that it indicates what he calls a "secret project." In fact, though, the term has been around for centuries and has been revived in contemporary Chinese pop culture, a slangy phrase that appears in articles about everything from soccer to romance. Pillsbury cites public speeches by Chinese

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In Washington, not many experts with such a record of self-sabotage would retain their influence at the top. But there's a market for Pillsbury's hawkish views.

leaders and articles in Chinese newspapers that speak of developing "*shashoujian*" weapons, but he never explains how this adds up to evidence of a secret program. It's as if a Chinese researcher, hearing a U.S. official speaking of a need for "kick-ass weapons," were to become confused by the term "kick-ass" and conclude that there must be a secret "kick-ass weapons" program. In short, Pillsbury has identified a secret program that, by all indications, is literally no more than a figure of speech.

"Poetic license"

Pillsbury's techniques of scholarship carry into his approach to self-promotion. Again, claims and evidence clash. The *Wall Street Journal* profile, for instance, wrote that "Mr. Pillsbury has never had to worry about steady employment. He's a member of the Pillsbury flour family," and a 1987 *Washington Post* article describes him as "related to the merchant-millionaire Pillsburys of Minneapolis." In Washington, this is helpful: It brings access to powerful people, attracts invitations to the right parties, and conveys the impression of immunity from the conflicts of interest that might bedevil needier men. Pillsbury's defenders often point to his wealth as an indication of his detachment from career urgencies.

A close examination of the Pillsbury flour fortune, however, shows no links to Michael Pillsbury. Asked about his ties to the family, Pillsbury is at first tentative: "It's a matter of degree. I am in the Pillsbury family tree in America." What about the flour fortune? "I don't know where that phrase came from. It didn't come from me." Pillsbury speculates that journalists might indulge in "poetic license."

Similarly, desirable professional affiliations attach themselves to him, but they're often obsolete. Pillsbury continues to figure as a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in articles, websites, and public appearances, even though he hasn't been with the Council since 1996. He claims to correct such errors "constantly" and says that his rivals are trying to undermine him. "There is this bastard down at the Atlantic Council who is a policy opponent of mine," Pillsbury explains. "He is the one that goes around accusing me of claiming to be a senior fellow when I am not. So, I called him directly. Stop doing this. He got really plucky." And who is he? "I seem to have forgotten his name."

Part of Pillsbury's authority derives from steady appearances in the media, to which he appears to be drawn. (Back in the 1980s, *The Washington Post* described Pillsbury as "an acknowledged master of political machination," and *Time* singled him out as one of "Washington's Master Leakers.") Today, Pillsbury makes frequent on-the-record appearances in a variety of sources, from *The Wall Street Journal* to *Defense News*, from *The Washington Times* to "Lou Dobbs Tonight" on CNN. Still, he says, "I don't return most reporters' phone calls," adding, "I am not, generally speaking, allowed to talk to the press."

Lately, a reliable ally has been *Washington Times* columnist Bill Gertz, with whom, according to an August 2002 article in the *Oriental Economist*, Pillsbury has regularly teamed up to derail nominations to key Asia-related jobs. This, too, Pillsbury denies: "I have occasionally, about five times, given Gertz on-the-record quotes for his stories." Actually, Pillsbury's name has appeared in 32 stories by Gertz since the late 1990s, of which at least 15 have contained on-the-record quotes.

Pillsbury's maneuverings and string-pulling often resemble scenes out of a spy novel, so it's no surprise that he's written his own. Pillsbury says the book still awaits clearance. "There are certain security review authorities," he explains. And he makes an offer: "I think I will put you in it. May have to have you killed off early in chapter one."

In Washington, not many experts with such a record of self-sabotage would retain their influence at the top. But there's a market for Pillsbury: There may be no other China expert with such hawkish views and a Ph.D. who has also served extensively in both the executive and legislative branches of government. More important, he gives his sponsors the research they want. China may turn into a serious enemy, or it may not. For now, we have chosen to assume the former, along with the costs. If the Bush administration has taught us anything, however, it's that overestimating a threat can be as dangerous as underestimating one. Rumsfeld and Pillsbury, it appears, take a different view. But what those of us on the outside must decide, once again, is whether the experts the White House hawks are choosing for their particular insight are really experts at all—whether their specialty lies in facts or speculation, in scholarship or in advertising, in conclusions based on evidence or in evidence based on conclusions. ♦

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WHY CONSERVATIVES CAN'T GOVERN

BY ALAN WOLFE

I.

Search hard enough and you might find a pundit who believes what George W. Bush believes, which is that history will redeem his administration. But from just about everyone else, on the right as vehemently as on the left, the verdict has been rolling in: This administration, if not the worst in American history, will soon find itself in the final four. Even those who appeal to history's ultimate judgment half-heartedly acknowledge as much. One seeks tomorrow's vindication only in the context of today's dismal performance.

About the only failure more pronounced than the president's has been the graft-filled plunder of GOP lawmakers—at least according to opinion polls, which in May gave the GOP-controlled Congress favorability ratings in the low 20s, about 10 points lower than the president's. This does not necessarily translate into electoral Armageddon; redistricting and other incumbency-protection devices help protect against that. But even if many commentators think that Republicans may retain control over Congress, very few think they should.

Eager to salvage conservatism from the wreckage of conservative rule, right-wing pundits are furiously blaming right-wing politicians for failing to adhere to right-wing convictions. Libertarians such as Bruce Bartlett fret that under Republican control, government has not shrunk, as conservatives prescribe, but has grown. Insiders like Peggy Noonan complain that Republicans have become—well, insiders; they are too focused on retaining power and too disconnected from the base whose anger pushed them into power. Idealistic younger conservatives bewail the care and feeding of the K Street beast. Paleocons Pat Buchanan and Robert Novak blame neocons William Kristol and Charles Krauthammer for the debacle that is Iraq. Through all these laments there pulsates a sense of desperation: A conservative president and an even more conservative Congress must be repudiated to enable genuine conservatism to survive. Sure, the Bush administration has failed, all these voices proclaim. But that is because Bush and his Republican allies in Congress borrowed big government and foreign-policy idealism from the left. The ideas of Woodrow Wilson and John Maynard Keynes, from their point of view, have always been flawed. George W. Bush and Tom DeLay just prove it one more time.

Conservative dissidents seem to have done an admirable job of persuading each other of the truth of their claims. Of course, many of these dissidents extolled the president's conservative leadership when he was riding high in the polls. But the real flaw in their argument is akin to that of Trotskyites who, when confronted with the failures of communism in Cuba, China and the Soviet Union, would claim that real communism had never been tried. If leaders consistently depart in disastrous ways from their underlying political ideology, there comes a point where one has to stop just blaming the leaders and start questioning the ideology.

The collapse of the Bush presidency, in other words, is not just due to Bush's incompetence (although his administration has been incompetent beyond belief). Nor is it a response to the president's principled lack of intellectual curiosity and pitbull refusal to admit mis-

Alan Wolfe teaches political science at Boston College and is the author of *Does American Democracy Still Work?* (Yale University Press).

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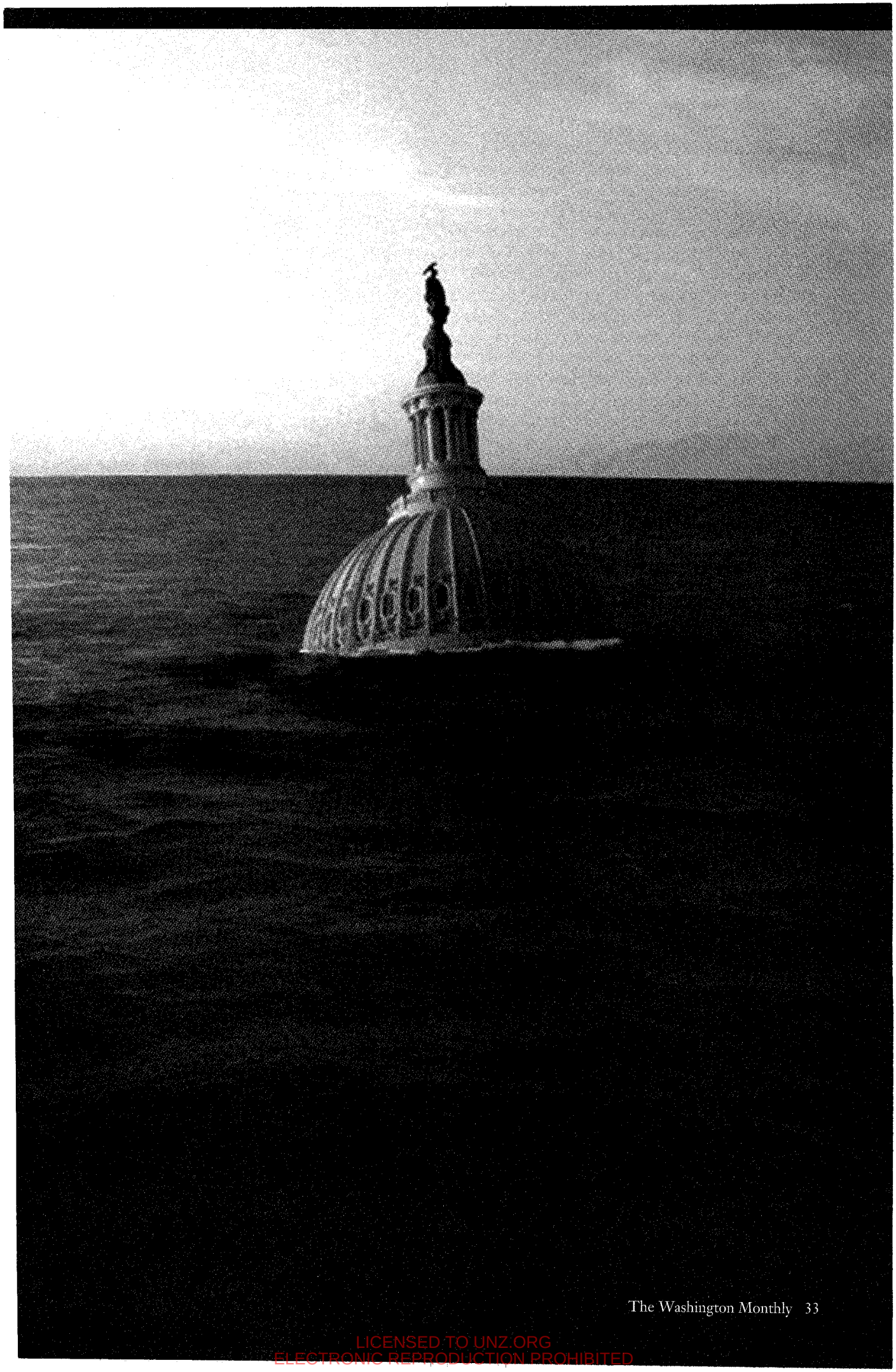

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takes (although those character flaws are certainly real enough). And the orgy of bribery and special-interest dispensation in Congress is not the result of Tom DeLay's ruthlessness, as impressive a bully as he was. This conservative presidency and Congress imploded, not despite their conservatism, but because of it.

Contemporary conservatism is first and foremost about shrinking the size and reach of the federal government. This mission, let us be clear, is an ideological one. It does not emerge out of an attempt to solve real-world problems, such as managing increasing deficits or finding revenue to pay for entitlements built into the structure of federal legislation. It stems, rather, from the libertarian conviction, repeated endlessly by George W. Bush, that the money government collects in order to carry out its business properly belongs to the people themselves. One thought, and one thought only, guided Bush and his Republican allies since they assumed power in the wake of *Bush vs. Gore:* taxes must be cut, and the more they are cut—especially in ways benefiting the rich—the better.

But like all politicians, conservatives, once in office, find themselves under constant pressure from constituents to use government to improve their lives. This puts conservatives in the awkward position of managing government agencies whose missions—indeed, whose very existence—they believe to be illegitimate. Contemporary conservatism is a walking contradiction. Unable to shrink government but unwilling to improve it, conservatives attempt to split the difference, expanding government for political gain, but always in ways that validate their disregard for the very thing they are expanding. The end result is not just bigger government, but more incompetent government.

"Ideas," a distinguished conservative named Richard Weaver once wrote, "have consequences." Americans have learned something about the consequences of conservative ideas during the Bush years that they never had to confront in the more amiable Reagan period. As a way of governing, conservatism is another name for disaster. And the disasters will continue, year after year, as long as conservatives, whose political tactics are frequently as brilliant as their policy-making is inept, find ways to perpetuate their power.

II.

The United States, as the political scientist Louis Hartz argued in the 1950s, was born liberal. We fought for our independence against Great Britain and the conservatism that flourished there. In Europe, a conservative was someone who defended the traditions of the monarchy, justified the privileges of the nobility, and welcomed the intervention of a state-affiliated clergy in politics. But all those things would be tossed out by the revolutionaries who led the war for independence and then wrote the Constitution. We chose to have an elected president, not an anointed monarch. Our Constitution prohibited the granting of titles of nobility. We separated church and state.

Of course, we had more than our share of thinkers who distrusted national authority; conservative political philosophy may not come naturally to Americans, but a fear of centralized power and an unwillingness to pay heavy taxes does. Beneath the broad political liberalism embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution was a frequently unexamined conservatism that questioned the very idea of the vibrant, expansive society that America promised to be.

Odd men out in America's liberal political culture, America's conservatives were never very unified. Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall wanted to see a strong national government created to improve America's economic prospects, even if they retained an aristocratic sense that only social superiors should control that government. (John Adams outdid them on behalf of a strong executive; he thought our first president should be addressed as a monarch). But this kind of New England Federalism would go into abeyance once America's democratizing forces were unleashed. Others insisted that this country should embody timeless Christian principles; they, however, soon ran up against the skepticism of the Founding Fathers and conceptions of religious liberty associated with dissenting Protestantism. With the decline of both, the only significant conservatism left would come from defenders of slavery such as John C. Calhoun. Once the advocate of a strong national government, Calhoun, putting the rights of slaveholders first, viewed this country as a compact among states, not as a unified society. His ideas would live on in the voices of those thinkers, primarily Southern, who objected to relying on national power to promote equal rights for all.

As this litany of lost causes suggests, our conservatives, while representing different regions and economic interests, were united by their irrelevance in the face of history. If the term reactionary is too pejorative, let's call them reactive. In this entrepreneurial, mobile, innovative, and individualistic country, conservatism was constantly on the defensive, aiming to preserve things—deference, reverence, and diffidence, to name three—that most Americans were anxious to shed. Deprived of both a church and state to defend, American conservatives became advocates for privileges determined by birth, suffrage restricted to an elite, and rural virtues over urban realities.

And so conservatives faced a dilemma from the moment the first shots were heard around the world. They could be true to their ideals and stand on the sidelines of political power. Or they could adjust their principles in the interests of political realism and thus negate the essential conservative teaching that principles are meant to be timeless. All the conservatives that played

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any role in America's history since the age of Jackson chose political relevance over ideological purity. The Whigs abandoned aristocracy to nominate a popular military leader in the 1840s, hoping thereby to outdemocratize the Jacksonians. An emerging business elite defended the free market—an 18th-century liberal innovation detested by agrarian-oriented conservatives—to protect the very kind of privileges that Adam Smith hoped the free market would curtail. Isolationists abandoned the cosmopolitanism of Hamilton, perhaps America's greatest conservative, for a populistic nativism suspicious of worldly grandeur. Clergy from evangelical churches played down such depressing doctrines as original sin and predestination in favor of the wonders of salvation for all. European conservatism had defended authority against liberty and social standing against equality. American conservatives used the language of liberty to justify inequality and promoted democracy to stand against change.

RIGHT-WING PUNDITS ARE FURIOUSLY BLAMING BUSH FOR FAILING TO ADHERE TO RIGHT-WING CONVICTIONS. BUT THEY ARE LIKE THE TROTSKYITES WHO CLAIMED THAT REAL COMMUNISM HAD NEVER BEEN TRIED.

A conservative in America, in short, is someone who advocates ends that cannot be realized through means that can never be justified, at least not on the terrain of conservatism itself. In the past, the ends sought were the preservation of hierarchy, even if the means included appeals to democratic sentiment. In more recent times, conservatives promised order and stability through means dependent upon the uncertainties and insecurities of the market. Unwilling to accept the fact that government was here to stay, conservatives stood on the sidelines as conditions kept arising that demanded bigger and more effective national authority. Westward expansion required Washington to settle the issue of slavery, and the recalcitrant South ultimately lost. Industrialization forced the country to deal with trusts and workplace oppression, and the Gilded Age leaders ultimately lost to the Progressives. The Depression demanded stronger government action even more urgently, even as the advocates of *laissez faire* opposed the New Deal. Similarly, the rise of fascism necessitated a vast expansion of federal power; and again, the conservative impulse, in the form of isolationism, lost.

By the 1950s, anti-federal-government conservatism was somewhat in retreat. Conservatives in the Republican Party still pushed for spending restraint while Southern conservatives in the Democratic Party resisted a greater role for the federal government in entrenching civil rights for blacks. But in general, leaders of both political parties, reflecting public sentiment, basically accepted big government as legitimate. The liberal propensities within both parties led to a federal government that continued to take on new challenges as they arose, from providing healthcare to seniors and the poor to regulating product safety and pollution.

But as we know now, the conservative anti-federal government impulse did not go away. Barry Goldwater, the last conservative purist in America, paid a huge political price for his frank disdain of government; abolishing mandatory Social Security and the Tennessee Valley Authority was not the way to win votes among the elderly in the South. In the 1970s, the conservative impulse went underground, incubating in a string of new think tanks funded by conservative philanthropists and sympathetic corporations. Although some of those who followed in Goldwater's footsteps—Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and then Bush—professed to share his distaste for government, none stood in the way of its growth. When given the opportunity, they shied away from enacting the think-tank talk of washing government down the bathroom drain. Although Ronald Reagan, a convert to anti-federal-government conservatism, won the White House in 1980 by feeding on public disgust with the excesses of liberalism, whatever plans he may have had to roll back the federal government were blocked by a Democratic Congress and public opinion. (Remember, for instance, the drubbing the GOP took in 1982 when it tried to axe Social Security benefits). Newt Gingrich and his revolutionaries rode a similar wave in 1994, but their plans were at least partially stymied by Bill Clinton's control of the White House and, again, by public opinion (the GOP lost seats in 1998).

With the election of George W. Bush in 2000, anti-government conservatism won control of both elected branches. This was something new. Conservatives hadn't held both Congress and the

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White House for a full term since 1932, before the creation of big government as we know it. For the first time in U.S history, conservatives had total control of the agencies of superpower government.

III.

If government is necessary, bad government, at least for conservatives, is inevitable, and conservatives have been exceptionally good at showing just how bad it can be. Hence the truth revealed by the Bush years: Bad government—indeed, bloated, inefficient, corrupt, and unfair government—is the only kind of conservative government there is. Conservatives cannot govern well for the same reason that vegetarians cannot prepare a world-class *boeuf bourguignon*: If you believe that what you are called upon to do is wrong, you are not likely to do it very well.

Three examples—FEMA, Medicare, and Iraq—should be sufficient to make this point. Because liberals have historically welcomed government while conservatives have resisted it, it should come as no surprise that the Federal Emergency Management Agency worked so well under Bill Clinton and so poorly under Bush I and II. True to a long tradition of disinterested public management, Clinton, in the wake of Hurricane Andrew, appointed James Lee Witt to head FEMA. Witt refocused FEMA away from civil-defense efforts to increasingly predictable national disasters, fought for greater federal funding, achieved cabinet status for his agency, and worked closely with state and local officials. For all the efforts by Republicans to attack their enemies, no one has ever put a dent in Witt's reputation. Government under him was as good as government gets.

Upon assuming office, George W. Bush turned to former Texas campaign aide Joe Allbaugh to run FEMA and then shifted it into the new Department of Homeland Security (whose creation he had opposed). Allbaugh, and his hand-picked successor Michael Brown, like so many Bush appointees, were afflicted with what we might call "learned incompetence." They did not fail merely out of ignorance and inexperience. Their ineptness, rather, was active rather than passive, the end result of a deliberate determination to prove that the federal government simply should not be in the business of disaster management. "Many are concerned that federal disaster assistance may have evolved into both an oversized entitlement program and a disincentive to effective state and local risk management," Allbaugh had testified before a Senate appropriations subcommittee in May, 2001. "Expectations of when the federal government should be involved and the degree of involvement may have ballooned beyond what is an appropriate level." There was the conservative dilemma in a nutshell: a man put in charge of a mission in which he did not believe.

Long before Katrina destroyed New Orleans, Allbaugh and Brown were busy destroying FEMA: privatizing many of the agency's programs, shifting attention away from disaster management, and shedding no tears as scores of agency staff left in dismay. Human beings cannot prevent natural disasters, but they can prevent man-made ones. Not the Bush administration. Its ideological hostility toward government all but guaranteed that the physical damage inflicted by a hurricane would be exacerbated by the human damage caused by incompetence.

The question of whether Medicare reform will prove politically fruitful for Republicans is still open. But the question of whether it has proven to be an administrative nightmare is not. There were two paths open to Republicans if they had been interested in creating an administratively coherent system of paying for the prescription drugs of the elderly. One was to give the elderly nothing and insist that every person assume the full cost of his or her medication. The other was to have government assume responsibility for the costs of those drugs.

It is significant that in America's recent debates over prescription drugs, no one, not even the Cato Institute, argued that government should simply not be in the business at all. As a society, we accept—indeed, we celebrate—the fact that older people can live longer and better lives thanks to radically improved medical technology as well as awe-inspiring advances in pharmacology. A political party which consigned to death anyone who could not afford to participate in this medical revolution would die an early death itself.

But Republicans were just as unwilling to design a sensible program as they were unable to eliminate the existing one. To prove their faith in the market, they gave people choices, when what they wanted was predictability. To pay off the pharmaceutical industry, they refused to allow government to negotiate drug prices downward, thereby vastly inflating the program's costs. To make sure government agencies didn't administer the benefit, they lured in insurance companies with massive subsidies and imposed almost no rules on what benefits they could and could not offer. The lack of rules led to a frustrating chaos of choices. And the extra costs had to be made up by carving out a so-called "doughnut hole" in which the elderly, after having their drug purchases subsidized up to a certain point, would suddenly find themselves without federal assistance at all, only to have their drugs subsidized once again at a later point. Caught between the market and the state, Republicans picked the worst features of each. No single human being could have designed a program as unwieldy as this one. It took the combined efforts of every faction in today's conservative movement to produce a public policy so removed from common sense.

The failure of the Bush administration to plan for

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the aftermath of the Iraq invasion was just one more, albeit the most serious, consequence of the conservative ambivalence toward government. Neoconservatives were all for ambitious adventures abroad, and, in the aftermath of September 11, they won the president's support. But they never captured his pocketbook, which was tenaciously guarded by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Neocons wanted the Republican Party to live in the shadow of Henry "Scoop" Jackson. Rumsfeld insisted that military adventures be funded in the spirit of Robert A. Taft.

CONSERVATIVES CANNOT GOVERN WELL FOR THE SAME REASON THAT VEGETARIANS CANNOT PREPARE A WORLD-CLASS BOEUF BOURGUIGNON: IF YOU BELIEVE THAT WHAT YOU ARE CALLED UPON TO DO IS WRONG, YOU ARE NOT LIKELY TO DO IT VERY WELL.

So long as conservatives denigrate government while relying on government to achieve their objectives, Rumsfeld's vision of how to fight wars is the only kind of conservative foreign policy one can have. His low-balling of troop estimates in Iraq was the foreign policy equivalent of libertarian economics: relying on government while refusing to pay for it. His hostility toward Iraqi reconstruction resonated with those skeptical of rebuilding New Orleans. His disdain for Colin Powell's State Department mirrored Joe McCarthy's for Dean Acheson's. Only a tried-and-true conservative could ever have come up with the idea of turning the management of Iraqi police forces over to private firms to the extent that Rumsfeld did, with catastrophic results for the Iraqis themselves. While it is difficult to label someone who plans a war an isolationist, Rumsfeld's hostility toward America's historic allies represented a contemporary version of unilateralism, which has always been isolationism's first cousin. The neoconservatives wanted to draft hugely expensive undertakings onto a party with an isolationist past. The Secretary of Defense wanted to draft on to the same political party a distant war, but with the promise of being cheap and avoiding the loss of American lives. It is not difficult to conclude which one would win in today's conservative environment.

For Pat Buchanan to blame the neocons for the failure in Iraq ignores the fact that the man most responsible for the failure, Donald Rumsfeld, has more in common with Buchanan than he does with Bill Kristol. (One prominent neoconservative, however, Paul Wolfowitz, did sign on enthusiastically to Rumsfeld's agenda.) Iraq failed for the same reasons that all conservative public policy efforts fail. Refusing to acknowledge the importance of government while relying on it to achieve your objectives causes the same kind of chaos in foreign policy that it does in matters closer to home.

IV.

One of the favorite myths of contemporary conservative dissidents is that the K Street machine, instead of being the irreplaceable lynchpin of conservative power, was somehow a betrayal of its ideals. This fable is captured by Matthew Continetti, a *Weekly Standard* reporter, in *The K Street Gang*, a conservative "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

In Continetti's telling, once upon a time—let's make it 1994—conservatives were idealistic revolutionaries. Gingrich and his cohorts were "optimistic, progressive, and overwhelmingly confident in the idea that you could run the federal government like a large corporation." Alas, however, Gingrich was unable to persuade his Republican colleagues to vote for Robert Walker of Pennsylvania as majority whip. Texas's Tom DeLay won the post instead, and DeLay was a man "who viewed government as a business—one that would maximize the advantages of business so that business would then donate to their political war chests." In this account, Gingrich and DeLay are not part of the same Republican revolution; indeed, one of them, DeLay, is a counterrevolutionary, Stalin to Gingrich's Trotsky. (Yes, Continetti makes that comparison.) The 1994 whip election, Continetti argues, became a struggle "between those who viewed power as a means to the end of limiting government and those who viewed power as an end in itself." DeLay's victory was therefore the beginning of Gingrich's downfall.

Continetti's tale is utterly implausible. To accept

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it, you have to believe that Gingrich was unaware of the extent to which DeLay was working behind his back to undermine him. You also have to explain away why many of those Republicans in Congress who voted for Gingrich for one position were also quite happy to vote for DeLay for another; surely they believed that both men had roughly similar views on how their party should conduct itself in office. Finally, you have to view Gingrich's attacks on K Street in the wake of DeLay's downfall as a continuation of his idealism, rather than positioning for a possible presidential race a view that only the most naïve could hold.

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE MARKET AND THE STATE, REPUBLICANS PICKED THE WORST FEATURES OF EACH IN DESIGNING THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROGRAM. IT TOOK THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF EVERY FACTION IN TODAY'S CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT TO PRODUCE A PUBLIC POLICY SO REMOVED FROM COMMON SENSE.

The fact is that Gingrich and DeLay, although they detested each other, were both products of the same aggressive conservatism that swept the Republicans into power in the first place. Far from representing two radically different forms of conservatism, they are best viewed as the good cop/bad cop dynamic of what was until recently a remarkably unified movement—one man providing the policy vision, the other adept at getting particular policies enacted. The K Street Project was not the product of DeLay's wily machinations, sure to fall from prominence along with DeLay's fall from power. (Now that DeLay is no longer majority leader, Republicans are not engaged in any serious effort to demolish the project; their current leader, John Boehner, a former ally of Gingrich, understands full well its importance). The seeds of the K Street Project were planted even before Gingrich assumed his position of majority leader, and the result will flower so long as conservative Republicans practice the kinds of politics they do.

Political parties expend the time and grueling energy to control government for different reasons. Liberals, while enjoying the perquisites of office, also want to be in a position to use government to solve problems. But conservatives have different motives for wanting power. One is to prevent liberals from doing so; if government cannot be made to disappear, at least it can be prevented from doing any good. The other is to build a political machine in which business and the Republican Party can exchange mutual favors; business will lavish cash on politicians (called campaign contributions) while politicians will throw the money back at business (called public policy). Conservatism will always attract its share of young idealists. And young idealists will always be disillusioned by the sheer amount of corruption that people like Gingrich and DeLay generate. If yesterday's conservative was a liberal mugged by reality, today's is a free-marketer fattened by pork.

Transforming the Republican Party into a highly disciplined organization determined to get its way without cooperation from the Democrats was an another objective shared by Gingrich and DeLay. Indeed, the former, not the latter, deserves the credit for substituting British-style party discipline and ideological extremism for bipartisan cooperation and moderation in the U.S. House of Representatives. Name an innovation associated with DeLay, and one discovers that it was previously institutionalized by Gingrich: developing redistricting rules to favor Republicans; encouraging House Republicans to vote as a unified bloc; weakening seniority so as to strengthen party leaders; freezing the opposition party out of a role in governance. It would take a decade after the Republican revolution of 1994 for the U. S. House of Representatives to fully transform

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itself into a body that no longer made a pretense of valuing fairness and deliberation. But that is only because Tom DeLay possessed a political advantage denied Gingrich: a fellow Republican in the White House.

It is a characteristic trope of political journalism to blame both parties equally for any malfeasance. But the partisan zealotry of the current U. S. House of Representatives has shocked such fair-minded, long-term observers of Congress as Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann; their book, *The Broken Branch*, is a lament for a time when Congressmen put the needs of their institution before those of their party. If Republican conservatives are trying something new in the world—and changing one of the two branches of Congress into an institution more likely to be found in a one-party state strikes me as new indeed—it is worth asking where their approach came from. And the answer is the same place where bad governance comes from: Partisanship this vindictive is part and parcel of what it means to be a conservative today.

Historically and philosophically, liberals and conservatives have disagreed with each other, not only over the ends political systems should serve, but over the means chosen to serve those ends. Whether through the ideas of James Madison, Immanuel Kant, or John Stuart Mill, liberals have viewed violent conflict as regrettable and the use of political institutions as the best way to contain it. Conservatives, from the days of Machiavelli to such twentieth-century figures as Germany's Carl Schmitt, have, by contrast, viewed politics as an extension of war, complete with no-holds-barred treatment of the enemy, iron-clad discipline in the ranks, cries of treason against those who do not support the effort with full-throated vigor, and total control over any spoils won. From a conservative point of view, separation of powers is divisive, tolerance a luxury, fairness another word for weakness, and cooperation unnecessary. If conservatives will not use government to tame Hobbes' state of nature, they will use it to strengthen Hobbes' state of nature. Victory is the only thing that matters, and any tactic more likely to produce victory is justified.

The K Street Project, then, did not arise spontaneously out of the ether. When Republicans in Congress began to inform lobbyists that in return for influence they would have to fire all the Democrats in their firms, they may have broken with long-standing traditions, but they were simply carrying forward politics-as-warfare the way conservative political philosophers have historically understood it. Liberals do not generally have objections to working with conservatives; indeed, having conservatives sign off on any expansion of government adds to the legitimacy of that expansion. But conservatives tend to see working with liberals as corrupting; in the immortal words of conservative activist Grover Norquist, "bipartisanship is another name for date rape." K Street is to lobbying what Fox News is to journalistic objectivity. In the world that contemporary conservatives have brought into being, rules are not applicable to all parties to a conflict. Rules are *part* of the conflict, and whoever wins the conflict gets to change the rules.

Once upon a time, conservatism may have appealed to history's losers, the agrarian interests displaced by industry or the small-business owners being bought out by multinational corporations. Not any longer. The most dynamic House Republicans, Gingrich and DeLay among them, did not arrive on Capitol Hill from rural byways and once-thriving but now depressed industrial towns; they came from booming sunbelt communities in the forefront of global transformation. They exploit Washington the way farmers once exploited land and industrial firms exploited workers. Their efforts are designed to help business and to build their party, and for those tasks, Congress, and the money at its disposal, is a weapon to use, not an institution to shrink. It took conservatives, who in the 18th and early 19th century supported quasi-feudal states and distrusted the instabilities of the market, a hundred years to become advocates of *laissez faire*. And under the imperatives of the K Street Project, it took them just five to abandon their belief in *laissez faire* to support a corrupt business-government partnership bearing striking resemblance to feudalism.

For a disillusioned idealist such as Matthew Continetti, Washington, D.C. is now filled with "people who mouth conservative principles while getting rich off conservative power." But what good are conservatives principles without conservative power? And what chance was there that conservatives could gain and hold political power without their joined-at-the-hip connection to K Street? Nearly every electoral and legislative success conservatives have enjoyed over the past six years has been crucially aided by the organizational and financial contributions of corporate lobbyists. The conservative vision of the world, because it is so hostile to government when government is so essential to the way we live now, remains unattractive to most Americans, which is why Republicans must rely on money to substitute for the large popular majorities they are unable to build and sustain. The idea that it could have been, or can be, different is a fantasy. A New England-based, patrician-oriented conservatism which insists on the importance of impersonal standards of high public conduct is as irrelevant in today's political economy as a Southern-style, gentlemanly conservatism that emphasizes chivalry and honor. The cavaliers and Mugwumps are long-gone from conser-

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BECAUSE GOVERNMENT IS THE ONE INSTITUTION THAT ALLOWS US SOME CONTROL OVER OUR FUTURE, CONSERVATISM, WHICH DISTRUSTS GOVERNMENT SO MUCH, IS BEST VIEWED AS A NATURAL COUNTER TO LIBERALISM, WHICH, IF LEFT UNCHECKED, TENDS TOWARDS WASTEFUL BUREAUCRACY.

vatism, and the Duke Cunninghams have replaced them.

V.

Behind the surge in right-wing criticism of the Bush presidency is the hope that *après le deluge*, Americans will give conservatism another chance. But even if Americans were inclined to do so, what kind of conservatism could be offered to them? If it somehow defied all laws of political gravity and carried through on its promise to shrink government, conservatism would add considerably to the level of misery at home and abroad—and lose whatever majorities it may have had in the process. If it managed to return to its roots in a South that no longer exists or a New England losing population to the rest of the country, conservatism would return to the marginalization that characterized its history. If it retreated behind its borders, it would lack the means to protect itself against threats emanating from overseas. The conservative dilemma, omnipresent in the past, looms over conservatism's future. It can reveal its true face and consign itself to oblivion or it can govern without conviction and produce unending incompetence.

There are ways out of the conservative dilemma. American conservatives could, for example, take away from the Bush years the lesson that they must change their ideology if they are ever again to make the Republican Party a serious party of governance. This is not beyond the realm of possibility. Conservatives in the American past—not only Hamilton and Marshall, but Daniel Webster and Henry Clay—were in favor of a strong government capable of meeting national objectives. There exists, moreover, a modernizing version of conservatism in contemporary Europe, where conservatives recognize the inevitability of government but try to tailor its objectives and improve its competence. Call this "big government conservatism" if you wish, but it would have little in common with that term as President Bush's critics use it to attack him and his administration. This would not be a conservatism that used government to pay off friends and punish enemies but one that sought to use government to stabilize society and avoid periodic crises.

Admittedly, not much evidence exists in America today that conservatives are prepared to move in such a direction. If anything, they seem to have reinforced and strengthened their determination to govern as incompetently and unfairly as they can. The fact that they will leave behind a public sector in roughly the same condition that strip miners leave hillsides would cause nothing but pain to yesterday's patricians, for whom ideals such as responsibility and soundness were watchwords. But today's conservatives have no problem passing on the costs of their present madness to future generations. Governing well would require them to use the bully-pulpit of office to educate and uplift their base. But since contemporary conservatives get their political energy from angry voices of rage and revenge, they will always blame others for the failures built into their ideology. That is why conservatism so rarely makes for a good governance party. As far as conservatives are concerned, it is always someone else's government, one reason they can be so indifferent to their own mismanagement.

Americans may have elected a Republican president and Congress, but they are unlikely to go back to a world in which one illness can devastate their last years or one storm can destroy their lives. Because government is the one institution that allows us some control over our future, conservatism, which distrusts government so much, is best viewed as a natural counter to liberalism, which, if left unchecked, tends towards wasteful bureaucracy. Indeed, as the Bush administration fully proves, conservatism remains a force of opposition even when it purports to be a governance party. And so the best that can be hoped for is that American voters will do for conservatives what they are unable to do themselves: to vote them out of office so that they can take their place as the party of opposition they were meant to be. ♦

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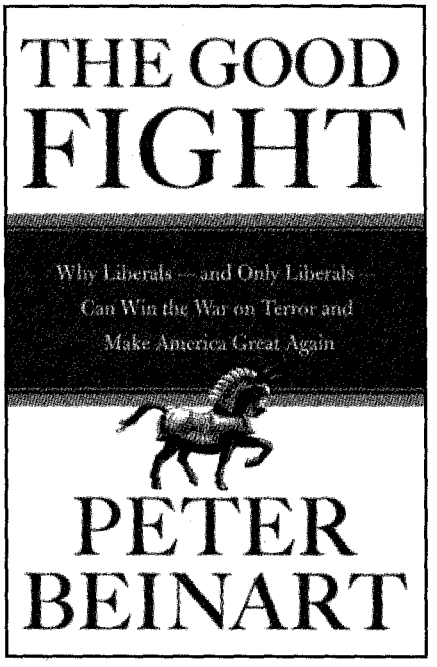
Cold Comfort

Liberalism's hawkish past is less useful as a guide to confronting future threats than Peter Beinart would like to believe.

By Fred Kaplan

John Kerry lost the 2004 election, it can reasonably be argued, not because of abortion or gay marriage but because of his own indecisiveness. Too few citizens trusted him with the nation's security in a time of terror (and, face it, many of us who voted for him did so with qualms). In the subsequent year-and-a-half, George W. Bush has squandered the advantage he held on that score—and wrecked the Republican Party's broad lead on military matters, to boot—but the Democrats have yet to devise an alternative vision. Peter Beinart, former editor and now editor-at-large of *The New Republic*, lays out his version of one in *The Good Fight: Why Liberals—and Only Liberals—Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again.*

It's a thoughtful, provocative, well-written book—but, ultimately, muddled and unsatisfying. Beinart contends (correctly) that liberals need to put forth a "narrative" that defines America's purpose at home and abroad on their terms. He further contends (less persuasively) that an ideal narrative lurks in the Democrats' own past—specifically, in the "cold war liberalism" that dominated American and Western politics from roughly 1947-64. There are two problems with this narrative, at least in Beinart's telling: It's a bit of a fairy tale, and it's not likely to inspire a lot of voters to put liberals back in the White House in 2008.



The Good Fight
By Peter Beinart
HarperCollins, $25.95

The Good Fight grew out of a much-discussed article—called "An Argument for a New Liberalism: A Fighting Faith"—that Beinart wrote for *The New Republic* in December 2004. Both the article and the book begin with an historic meeting in January 1947 at the Willard Hotel in Washington D.C., when 130 leaders of the Americans for Democratic Action, the era's vital coalition of liberals and labor, expelled former Vice President Henry Wallace's faction of communists and fellow-travelers from their ranks. That moment defined the liberal mainstream for the next 20 years: a domestic policy built on FDR's New Deal and a foreign policy that recognized the central threat posed by Soviet totalitarianism. And cold war liberals—unlike their conservative counterparts—would wage this struggle not as a self-righteous crusade but through alliances and international institutions: not only with power but also with legitimacy. Just as the ADA expelled Wallace's faction at the start of the Cold War, Beinart argues, today's liberals must expel the likes of Michael Moore and MoveOn.org if the Democratic Party is to remain relevant in the war against the

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new Islamist totalitarianism.

There are several things wrong with this analogy, as there are with Beinart's reading of American history. First, Beinart overrates the prominence of Moore, MoveOn, and left-wing pacifists generally. Henry Wallace was at one time a presumptive presidential nominee; his followers included prominent politicians and officials. This is not true of Beinart's present-day enemies to the left. Second, and more to the point, Wallace's faction included—was, in many ways, dominated by—communists. Michael Moore is a mendacious boor, but he is hardly a terrorist or a bin Laden sympathizer, nor are the leaders or funders of MoveOn.org. Beinart acknowledges this distinction, but fails to recognize that it blows his case, and that it makes the opening anecdote—the analytical foundation—of his book puzzlingly beside the point.

In the schism of '47, the ADA never insisted that its members be active anti-communists, much less that anti-communism be the central element of liberalism. Beinart, however, writes that "the core issue" for liberals today is to accept that the struggle against Islamist totalitarianism "define[s] what liberalism is." This goes too far, not only as a substantive matter, but still more as an electoral strategy (which Beinart means his book, in part, to be). The Democratic Party is—and, since FDR's time, has been—too much of a coalition to be hemmed in by so severe a litmus test. Beinart is right that liberals can't win national office if they oppose American intervention as a matter of principle. But if, as he insists, liberalism is to be defined by an imperative to intervene in the name of democracy—or, for that matter, by any issue of foreign policy—they are no less doomed to defeat.

There is a 400-pound gorilla tearing at the margins of this book, and that is the war in Iraq. Beinart's December '04 *New Republic* essay was targeted at the Democratic opponents of that war. (Opponents of the Afghanistan invasion, whom the article also—more properly—trounced, comprised a minority of a minority, hardly worth such heavy ammunition.) Beinart was one of the "liberal hawks" who, even at that late date, still supported the war. In the introduction to his book, he now admits that he was wrong: "I was too quick to give up on containment... I overestimated America's legitimacy." He adds, "It is a grim irony that this book's central argument"—the continuing relevance of cold war liberalism as a vision of American self-confidence, containment, restraint, and legitimacy—"is one I myself ignored when it was needed most."

It is a graceful and gracious retraction, but it also succinctly summarizes the book's other main conceptual flaw: its romanticizing of the Cold War. Beinart writes as if "cold war liberalism" were some coherent doctrine that Democratic presidents, especially Truman and (in his finest hours) Kennedy, adopted to the letter. His intellectual heroes are George Kennan, the statesman who coined the policy of containment, and Reinhold Niebuhr, the theologian who reconciled moral principles with the hard-headed interests of *realpolitik*. Both are worthy heroes. Niebuhr especially deserves a reassessment these days. Believing in the Christian tenet that all men are sinners, Niebuhr reasoned that all nations are capable of evil, too. America has a superior political system, he allowed, in that it keeps evil at bay through checks and balances. But that only means it must do the same in its foreign policy—by accepting some restraints on its power: not to the point of refraining from warfare (Niebuhr was no pacifist), but stringently guarding against the delusion that America's intentions are inherently pure and that its leaders can therefore do as they please without seeking consent from the community of nations.

Using Niebuhr as a template, Beinart pinpoints what's so basically dangerous about Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neocons (all of them, as he cogently puts it, the "intellectual heirs" of John Foster Dulles and his "rollback" doctrine). It's precisely their "complacent confidence in American virtue," which not only blinds them to the world's skepticism but keeps them from seeing any need to prove the skeptics wrong. By contrast, in the liberal view, as Beinart paints it, "America's challenge lies not in recognizing our moral superiority but in demonstrating it... [N]ational greatness is not inherited and it is not declared; it is earned."

This is a fine sentiment, but it has little to do with real-life American history. Beinart begins one sentence: "As Truman and Niebuhr were defining cold war liberalism..."—a notion that would have come as a surprise to both of them. Niebuhr was never a counselor to the powerful. Beinart exaggerates Kennan's role, too. In the late 1940s, Kennan was director of the State Department's policy planning staff, a position far more important than it is now. But Secretary of State Dean Acheson fired him in 1950, after months of intense arguments, and replaced him with Paul Nitze. Acheson regarded Kennan's concept of containment as too passive, too restrained. Kennan believed Soviet expansion could be held in check mainly through economic and political pressure. Acheson and Nitze believed a vast U.S. military build-up was necessary. One could say, in Beinart's terms, that Acheson fired Kennan for holding excessively Niebuhrian views. Curiously, Beinart doesn't mention this dispute—which anticipated the hawk/dove split of the next 40 years. He doesn't mention Nitze at all and drops Acheson's name only in passing, even though they were Truman's men—and thus the official "cold war liberals"—far longer than Kennan. Nor does he acknowledge that Dulles's dreadful philosophy of "rolling back" communism was considerably watered down in practice by President Eisenhower, a much more moder-

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There is a 400-pound gorilla tearing at the margins of this book, and that is the war in Iraq.

ate man than his feverish secretary of state. (The difference between Dulles and his Bush-era heirs is that the latter, alas, serve a president who agrees with them.)

In short, Beinart's whole concept of "cold war liberalism" is somewhat mythical, and its putative contrast with "cold war conservatism" is at least exaggerated. For instance, he writes that the problem with the war in Iraq "wasn't merely that America failed to convince Iraqis that it had their best interests at heart; it's that America did not always have Iraqis' best interests at heart." But does Beinart mean to suggest that, say, Truman intervened in Greece and Turkey because he cared about the Greeks' and Turks' best interests—or that Kennedy sent advisers to South Vietnam out of concern for its people's best interests? These decisions, right or wrong, were based on cold calculations of American national interests. And, while Kennan and Niebuhr disagreed with these calculations on Vietnam, they too thought U.S. interests should govern U.S. foreign policy.

It's one thing for Beinart to advocate a foreign policy based on Niebuhr's ideas of realism and restraint. It's another thing, and quite misleading, to claim that such a policy is deeply rooted in the historical practices of American liberalism.

In several respects, *The Good Fight* is a valuable book. Beinart is right in urging liberals to craft a foreign policy more inspiring and substantive than the clerkish "competence" promised by Michael Dukakis and John Kerry. But I wish that he had grappled more fully with the context of many liberals' vacillations on national-security policy—the tension, which nobody seems to know how to resolve, between the protection of American interests and the expansion of American ideals. Bush pretends that there is no tension—that our interests and our ideals are synonymous. Beinart indulges in the same pretense, though from a different angle.

Beinart writes, "The brave Middle Eastern liberals who are fighting for democracy and against Salafism need us. They need our money, our expertise, and our example, just as anticommunist liberals and socialists did in Western Europe more than a half-century ago." The comparison is iffy. America shared the same Enlightenment background—and the same enemy in the Soviet Union—as those Western European liberals, most of whom, by the way, were also heads of state. It's unclear who these "Middle Eastern liberals" are. Certainly they don't occupy positions of political power. In any case, to the extent they do need us, they may not want us and, in many cases, they can't openly say they do. This isn't to say they're not worth seeking out and supporting—only that it's a far more problematic task. Historical appeals to the Marshall Plan and NATO don't really resonate.

The "good fight" that Beinart writes about is indeed a good fight. How to wage it, and who might be best at doing so, remain open questions.

Fred Kaplan is the national-security columnist for *Slate* and the author of *The Wizards of Armageddon*.

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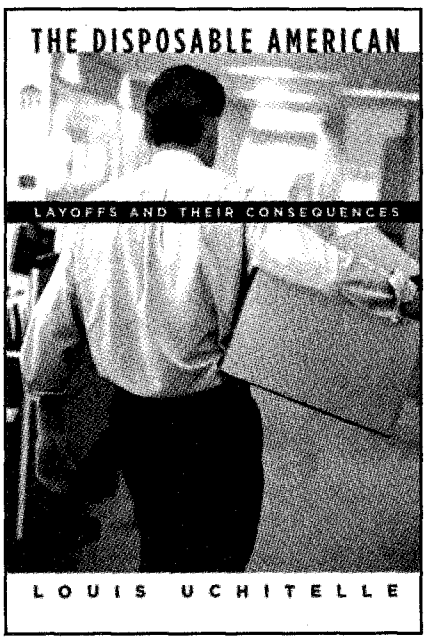
The Book of Jobs

A patient account of the pain of layoffs.

By David Kusnet

Among all the reporters who write about economics for the mainstream media, Louis Uchitelle is the indispensable iconoclast who covers corporate chief executives critically and working people sympathetically. If he seems like a throwback to an era when members of the working press identified with other working stiffs, that's because he remembers an American economy where workers expected that, if they did their work well and their employers prospered, their jobs would not be in jeopardy. He was hired as a reporter for the Associated Press in 1957, and, soon afterwards, became a "permanent" employee, with "paid vacations, health insurance, overtime pay, a pension plan, [and] annual wage increases" under the AP's union contract with the Newspaper Guild. Joining *The New York Times* in 1980, he brought his memories of an economy where, as he now recalls, "job security was tangible, so tangible that it could be conferred on people, and it was."

For much of his career, Uchitelle has covered the casualties of the transition to the new economy. In 1996, he was the lead writer and reporter for a six-part *Times* series on "The Downsizing of America," which reported that more than 43 million jobs had been wiped out in the United States between 1979 and 1995. This spring, his first book, *The Disposable American*, appeared, expanding on his series, describing how massive layoffs hurt individual workers, their families, their companies and their communities.



The Disposable American
By Louis Uchitelle
Alfred A. Knopf, $26.00

The Disposable American is a good book about an important topic. Uchitelle tells the stories of layoffs with sympathy for the victims and outrage at their suffering. He convincingly makes the case that massive layoffs are usually self-defeating and should be undertaken only as a last resort. But not every workplace abuse can be viewed through the lens of layoffs, as Uchitelle seems to do here. The author offers only a sketchy explanation of how and why modern job-shedding emerged, and he doesn't explore when it might be justifiable. Nor does he devote much attention to the aftermath of layoffs: the challenge of creating new jobs that provide good pay, benefits, and opportunities. Because Uchitelle concentrates almost exclusively on protecting existing jobs, he dismisses the idea of preparing workers for new and better jobs, and he displays an inexplicable animus against the Clinton administration whose economic strategy laid a heavy emphasis on job creation, as well as education and re-training. (Full disclosure: I served as a speechwriter for President Clinton from 1992-1994.)

In spite of these shortcomings, *The Disposable American* is essential reading, especially for its engrossing and enlightening accounts of mass layoffs at several companies. One story is that of Stanley Works, a hardware manufacturer, that once was the largest employer in New Britain, Conn. When competition from low-wage countries first cut into Stanley's sales in the late 1970s, the company tried to trim its payroll by freezing the hiring of white-collar

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employees. Stanley's original management began to lay off blue-collar workers only after long and painful talks with the workers' union and civic leaders. The company's chief executive Donald W. Davis is a sympathetic figure, someone with deep roots in New Britain, and was clearly anguished about the layoffs.

But when Stanley failed to make a comeback, the board of directors hired a new chief executive, John M. Trani, a protégé of GE's legendary CEO, Jack Welch. Trani, who wiped out almost a third of Stanley's workforce, is presented as arrogant, refusing to hobnob with workers or consult with the mayor. Stanley had evolved from respecting certain "social norm[s]" to recognizing only the imperatives of its corporate bottom line—a shift that reflected a fundamental change in corporate America from the late 1970s through the late 1990s.

While Stanley was an old manufacturing concern, United Airlines's was a modern company that seemed more likely to grow than to die. In 1994, the airline's Indianapolis maintenance center was the nation's most efficient facility for repairing midsized narrow-body airliners. Staffed by skilled mechanics, the center did such good work that it began to attract repair business from other airlines. But during two July Fourth weekends in 1999 and 2000, the mechanics refused to work overtime. When their union supported them in a work slowdown, United Airlines began to shut down the center and shift the work to non-union contractors. By 2003, the company closed down the facility. In the new economy, quality does not guarantee jobs, and low costs and tight management control are the ultimate goal.

When the facility closed, most of the workers participated in a counseling and retraining program. But they were still unable to find jobs that offered pay and benefits remotely comparable to what they had earned before. American workers, says Uchitelle, already have more skills than the economy requires, and retraining programs are almost always exercises in futility.

In his third set of stories, Uchitelle follows the careers of several executives who lost their jobs. Here his empathy becomes mawkish. Most of these unemployed executives were treated relatively well; one received her full salary for almost a year while looking for new work; and almost all ended up in jobs that support a middle-class lifestyle. Management positions with six-figure salaries are not lifetime entitlements. When companies hit hard times, middle managers should share the pain.

Layoffs may initially save money and boost stock prices. But firing large numbers of employees costs companies much of their institutional memory and storehouse of skills, shatters the morale of the remaining workers, and ultimately leads to lower quality and less efficiency. The psychological consequences of layoffs also take a staggering toll. Workers who are told they no longer contribute anything of value rarely recover their confidence. These working wounded are more anxious and less adventurous in their new jobs, and the entire economy suffers the consequences.

The Disposable American exhaustively explores the social and economic costs of these massive modern job losses. But it doesn't fully explain how today's massive and permanent layoffs emerged. Even during the heyday of progressive capitalism, roughly from the end of World War II to the late 1970s, companies laid off large numbers of workers when they hit hard times. Aerospace giant Boeing, for instance, was a generous and almost entirely unionized employer (in a rarity for firms in this country, its engineers and technicians, as well as its blue-collar workers, are unionized), that laid off 50,000 workers when aircraft orders nosedived after World War II. But for the three decades after 1945, most layoffs at American companies were temporary furloughs, not permanent firings. Starting with the flood of imports and the deep recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were steep declines in basic industries like steel, cars, consumer appliances, clothing and textiles. Major companies like GM, GE, Caterpillar, and U.S. Steel responded by laying off tens of thousands of workers. Because these companies' sales orders and profit margins never fully recovered (and many of the workers' jobs were automated), they never recalled most of their laid-off workers to their former positions.

These permanent layoffs paved the way for other companies, many of which weren't losing money, to make lasting cuts in their workforces. But Uchitelle doesn't draw clear distinctions between which mass layoffs are indefensible, which are inevitable, and which are debatable. He indicts the management-by-body-count of corporate cutthroats like Albert "Chainsaw" Dunlap, who hatcheted half of Sunbeam's 12,000 employees without leading his company to profitability. But he doesn't respond to the arguments that Jack Welch makes in favor of eliminating a company's least promising operations and refocusing it towards future growth—the strategy that John Trani implemented at Stanley,

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where the bloodletting eventually restored the company's profits and prospects. Nor does Uchitelle describe how, when layoffs are inescapable, a company can conduct them humanely, as Levi Strauss did after it was unable to mass-produce blue jeans profitably in the United States. Long considered a model employer, Levi Strauss became a model former employer, offering workers three weeks of severance pay for every year of service, as well as up to $6,000 each for education and retraining costs. Uchitelle stresses the role of globalization in displacing millions of American workers. But he doesn't really address the extent to which technology has also claimed many manufacturing and middle-management jobs.

By reducing all the changes in American work-life to the loss of lifetime jobs, Uchitelle inadvertently distorts developments that are about much more than the end of job security. The story of the United Airlines maintenance center is about something larger than layoffs. The real mystery is why a major company and a mature union escalated a routine dispute—whether to schedule overtime work over holiday weekends. After all, it was in each side's self-interest not to risk destroying the maintenance center and eliminating the mechanics' jobs. United Airlines had made a substantial investment in the new facility, and the mechanics worked at high-skill, high-wage jobs with outstanding benefits and union representation—a rarity in the modern economy. But a simple overtime dispute managed to lock both sides into a mutually destructive conflict. The layoffs were merely the collateral damage of a dispute that reflected the collapse of the understandings that had prevailed between labor and management for the quarter century after World War II.

When he turns to national economic problems, Uchitelle devotes little attention to the issues of how many new jobs are being created, what kind of pay, benefits, and career opportunities these new jobs offer, and how to prepare workers for a changing labor market. This oversight is especially important since this book concentrates on the late 1990s, when layoffs and job creation both reached record levels. Indeed, as Clinton economic advisor Gene Sperling points out in his recent book, *The Pro-Growth Progressive*, a stunning 32.9 million private-sector jobs were destroyed in the U.S. But 35.5 million new ones were created in their place.

Of course, all this churning raises the question of how the newly created jobs compare to the recently eliminated jobs. Uchitelle correctly criticizes the Clinton administration for releasing a study contending that the new jobs paid more, when the most that could credibly be claimed was that the new jobs were in industries that tended to pay more (This is an important distinction. For instance, working in high tech generally pays better than working in building services. But non-union janitors at high-tech companies most likely earn less than unionized janitors in apartment buildings). But, he downplays the fact that, as the economy approached full employment by 1999 and 2000, workers' wages began to rise and economic inequality began to decline for the first time since the 1960s.

In fact, Uchitelle's criticisms of the Clinton administration seem over the top. He writes that corporate layoffs received "a green light from Clinton," but he doesn't quite explain how a president could have given layoffs a red or even yellow light (short of using the "bully pulpit" of the presidency and the incentives of awarding federal contracts to responsible employers, both of which Clinton sporadically tried to do). He claims that the president "abandoned a campaign promise to stop corporations from hiring permanent replacements for workers on strike." But, a few pages later, he acknowledges that Clinton issued an executive order forbidding federal contractors from permanently replacing striking workers—about all a president can do without congressional approval. He faults Clinton for supposedly ignoring the recommendations of a federal commission that he had appointed in an effort to broker a deal between corporate and union leaders to reform the nation's labor laws. But by the time that the commission released its report, the Republicans had won majorities in both the U.S. House and Senate; Clinton wisely refused to encourage a Congress controlled by Newt Gingrich to rewrite the National Labor Relations Act. Uchitelle believes both issues were about layoffs. But striker replacement was really about restoring the balance of bargaining power between workers and their employers. And labor-law reform was about restoring workers' right to organize unions. Remarkably, Uchitelle offers relatively little criticism of the current Bush administration, which has presided over an era of huge job losses and little job creation—and, unlike its predecessor, unashamedly favors corporate interests over workers' rights.

Uchitelle does offer a grab-bag of recommendations for reducing layoffs. Unfortunately, many of them—like raising the minimum wage—are worth-

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while ideas that have little to do with making existing jobs more secure. He criticizes Clinton for failing to support several proposals from Labor Secretary Robert Reich that would have required companies to improve their training programs for all employees. But he doesn't include those ideas in his own recommendations, and tends to be scornful of these training programs.

Uchitelle's skepticism about these programs is understandable—education and training have been oversold as panaceas for layoffs and wage stagnation. Many counseling and retraining efforts do, in fact, amount to little more than support groups for jobless workers. But what is the alternative? Now that most jobs can be off-shored and most industries are vulnerable to imports, how can we create and preserve good jobs in this country?

America can't compete by paying our workers less than our less-advanced competitors, so we have to do the important things better than even our most advanced competitors. We need to be the economy that invents things first, brings them to the world's markets soonest, offers the highest quality, does the best job customizing products and services, and does it all affordably, if not at the "China price." As Clinton and Reich used to say, that means investing in our communities' communications networks and transportation facilities, and lifting the burden of exorbitant health-care costs from the economy. And, yes, it also means educating, training, and retraining American workers.

For this training to be useful, employers, employees, and other institutions—from government agencies to labor unions and community colleges—need to work together in new ways. Unions need to organize in growing industries like high-tech and offer training programs for an increasingly mobile workforce along the lines of the apprenticeship programs in the building trades and career ladder programs in health care and public employment. In an example of this strategy, the Communications Workers of America is bargaining with telecommunications companies to make sure that union members in lower-paid jobs can apply for newly created jobs that require higher skills and offer higher wages; at the same time, the union is working with the companies to create training programs to prepare union members for these new and desirable jobs.

Companies and unions should take the lead in these efforts because they know what jobs already exist and are likely to emerge, implicitly answering the commonplace question, "training for what?" But government agencies and community colleges can help finance these efforts and conduct some of the actual teaching. These ongoing efforts would prepare currently employed workers for real job opportunities.

These skill-development programs won't emerge until we restore some understandings in American workplaces. The old social contract provided lifetime jobs for workers who were loyal to their companies. The new bargain needs to offer new opportunities in return for new skills. Only then will workers have any reason to believe they're indispensable, not disposable.

David Kusnet was chief speechwriter for former president Bill Clinton from 1992 through 1994. He was on the staff of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) from 1974 through 1984 and has been an adviser to labor organizations since 1995. He is writing a book about workplace conflicts in today's America, *Love the Work, Hate the Job*, for the publisher John A. Wiley and Sons.

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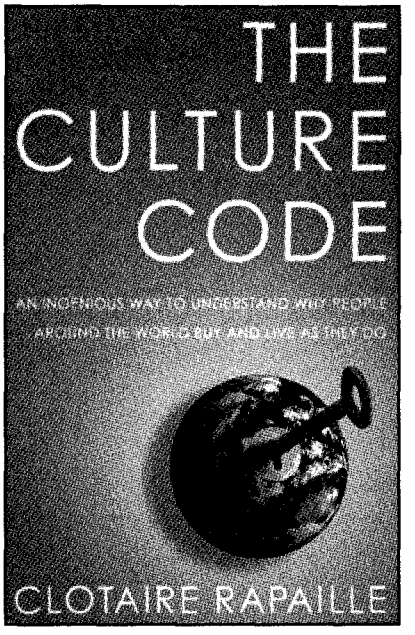
Analyze This

How culture shapes our inner shopper.

By David Wallace-Wells

In the late '90s, Chrysler was having trouble selling its Wrangler Jeep. The flimsy two-door convertible, adapted liberally from the American military model after World War II and given somewhat improbable second life as a devil-may-care dune-buggy in the '80s, was being outpaced in sales by the giant, reassuringly roofed SUVs that had begun to flood the market earlier in the decade. Some executives at the company thought there was little demand for an impractical fetish object like the Wrangler, and that the time had come to mercifully put the model down, just as profit-conscious executives had retired the classic versions of earlier iconic American automobiles like the Ford Mustang and the Thunderbird. Chrysler considered comprehensively redesigning the Wrangler, and toyed with the idea of junking the car entirely. They believed that American consumers wanted more comfort, and sturdier construction, than the Wrangler offered. They believed that Americans wanted car safety in the form of doors and roofs. They believed that Americans wanted SUVs, and that they wanted their Jeep Wranglerss—if they wanted them at all—to look more like Jeep Grand Cherokees.

Chrysler believed all these things because their customers had told them so. The focus groups had been nearly unanimous, the market research conclusive. The Wrangler had been a consistently profitable model for many years, however, and several decision-makers at the company remained ambivalent about reworking one of their signature brands. One consultant, a former clinical psychologist named Clotaire Rapaille, was particularly skeptical of the research and asked to personally conduct a new series of studies on the car. This investigative episode is one of many crusades against conventional wisdom Rapaille proudly recounts in *The Culture Code*, his new iconoclastic marketing primer.



The Culture Code
By Clotaire Rapaille
Broadway, $24.95

Like many pollsters and social scientists, Rapaille—whose advice was sought in 2004 by advisers to John Kerry—had come to understand that interview subjects are animated much more by a desire to please than by a searching, contemplative sincerity, and that they overwhelmingly provide those answers that they believe will satisfy the expectations of their interlocutors. Worse, Rapaille writes, even those participants prepared to bare their feelings about the Wrangler didn't make reliable subjects, since so very few of them had ever bothered to think in any penetrating way about what they wanted from cars in general, and from a lightweight, unsafe, fuel-inefficient convertible jeep model in particular. They, too, grasped at straws and took their cues from some vague sense of conventional wisdom. Customers had real preferences, Rapaille believed, but those preferences were buried beneath several layers of socialization that prevented them from being expressed clearly. So rather than interview potential customers, Rapaille decided to psychoanalyze them.

When he returned to Chrysler with his results, he announced that the main thing Americans wanted from their jeeps was for them to look more like horses. Across the boardroom, the Chrysler executives had their doubts. They had invested a great deal of time and money in Rapaille, and he was now telling them to ignore their customers' unmistakable requests for more luxury and safety, and instead to make only one small cosmetic change. The Wrangler's headlights should

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be round, he said, because horses don't have square eyes.

Eventually, Rapaille convinced Chrysler to modify the design of the Wrangler rather than overhaul it, and to include round headlights in the new model. The resulting relaunch was "a smash." In its advertising campaign, Chrysler presented the Wrangler as a noble, nomadic hero that arrived serendipitously in perilous situations, resolved them thanklessly, and rode off quietly into the sunset. The car tested well and sold better. Jeep has since made the Wrangler grille, with its round headlights, the company logo.

When asked to replicate the campaign for Chrysler in Europe, however, Rapaille insisted on devising a new marketing strategy from scratch. The iconography of the American West, he argued, had no resonance in France and Germany. For those markets, he concluded after several continental sessions, the Wrangler still evoked the American military model used in World War II, and retained great positive associations with the liberation of Europe from Nazi rule. Rapaille helped design instead a campaign that emphasized the proud history of jeeps in the region and the profound freedom of postwar Europe. Sales soared.

When Rapaille, who had a flourishing psychoanalytic practice in his native France, began to consult for corporations in midcareer, he was intrigued by the idea of the marketplace as an objective sociological experiment. He hoped that, unlike his clinical work, purchasing patterns could provide immediate, comprehensive, and reliable feedback, and offer an ideal testing ground for several pet theories of human behavior. He believed, for instance, that most social learning and acculturation takes place as a series of intensely emotional experiences in the early lives of children—the pain of a hand on the frying pan, the shame of wetting the bed. These experiences, Rapaille says, are imprinted on the limbic region of the brain and form our most fundamental sense of who we are, what our culture expects of us, and what we aspire to be. A marketing goldmine, in other words, if only one could excavate it.

The Culture Code attempts to map those imprints, which Rapaille believes are not merely vivid memories but the very emotional grammar of our social existence, invisible impulses and associations that overrule our reason, direct our behavior, and brand us as unmistakably American. (Or French, or Japanese, or Eskimo). He calls them culture codes, and argues that they comprise a "cultural unconscious" that deserves a place on the psychoanalytic ladder between the Freudian individual unconscious and the Jungian collective unconscious. He does not quite earn this company.

In his research sessions, which he calls "discoveries," Rapaille has participants lie down with pillows and blankets, plays soothing mood music, and asks them to relax. Then, like a hypnotist instructing his charges, he guides them back in time, through their childhoods, to recall their earliest memories of a product or brand, and diligently records their responses for analysis. (After one study, he advised the Swiss company Nestlé to abandon efforts to introduce coffee to Japanese adults, whose childhoods were saturated with memories of tea, and instead adopt a long-term strategy, normalizing the foreign flavor in Japanese culture by aggressively marketing coffee-flavored sweets to Japanese children).

The chapters of *The Culture Code*, which are essentially annotated notes from several dozen discovery sessions, proceed in discrete thematic installments and yield several analytic diamonds in the anecdotal rough. In a chapter on engineering, Rapaille argues that we care less about mechanical perfection than we do about the built-in opportunity to trade up when our computers and cars do, inevitably, fail; later, he writes that we do not demand perfection from our political leaders, either, only that they demonstrate a capacity for self-improvement. In a meditation on beauty, Rapaille suggests that obesity might not be the problem we generally understand it to be—a failure of nutrition, health education, and a gluttonous national appetite—but the sad, incidental result of widespread anxiety and self-doubt, much like the high rate of high-school dropouts or the common cosmetic use of pharmaceuticals.

These are incisive bits of observation, worth a contemplative chew, but they do not add up to a comprehensive model of human behavior, as Rapaille had hoped. *The Culture Code* is not a major work of social psychology, as it turns out, but a gregarious, ruminative professional memoir, offering here and there real insight into the character of our frenetic consumer culture.

David Wallace-Wells is a writer in New York.

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Out of Order

How the GOP broke Congress.

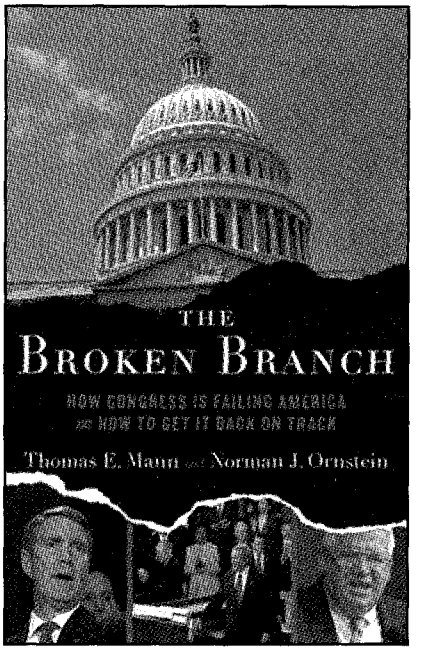
By Kevin Drum

As George W. Bush is fond of reminding the American public, he is a wartime president. And you can hardly run a war if naysayers and ankle-biters are allowed to run around nipping at your heels all the time, can you?

At least that's how Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney appear to see things. Cheney in particular has long felt that presidential power was allowed to ebb dangerously during the '70s-era backlash against Richard Nixon's imperial presidency, and he came to office determined to reverse that course. To help him, he brought along two experienced bureaucratic warriors: Lewis "Scooter" Libby, his chief of staff until he was indicted in the Valerie Plame case last year, and David Addington, the pit bull lawyer who replaced Libby.

The fight to increase presidential power started early. A few weeks after taking office, Bush first postponed the scheduled release of presidential papers from previous administrations and then issued an executive order giving himself the power to restrict their release indefinitely. Later that year, the Department of Justice issued new rules limiting the use of Freedom of Information Act requests. And Cheney's determined efforts to keep the proceedings of his Energy Task Force secret are legendary.

But that was just a warmup; it was 9/11 that sent Bush's effort into high gear. At Addington's urging, Bush has appended "signing statements" to over 750 bills, essentially asserting his right to ignore the will of Congress if, in his opinion, it impinges on his presidential prerogatives. He has claimed the sole right to determine how enemy combatants are treated. He has vastly increased the number of documents classified "Secret" and "Top Secret" and has even authorized the reclassification of formerly public documents. He has denied habeus corpus for years to Jose Padilla, an American citizen, along the way doing everything he could to prevent the Supreme Court from ruling on the constitutionality of his actions. And he has authorized domestic surveillance programs by the National Security Agency that were never approved by either Congress or the courts.



The Broken Branch
By Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein
Oxford, $26.00

On a dizzyingly broad array of fronts, in other words, he has pretty much asserted the authority to do anything he wants and to do it without any pesky oversight. The courts have—so far—not pushed back very hard against this, and that's not too surprising: Courts tend to work slowly, they're historically deferential to presidential power in national-security areas, and they can only rule on cases brought before them. They are reactive, not proactive.

But what about Congress? What excuse does it have for being so supine? The easy answer, of course, is also the most obvious one: Both Congress and the presidency are in the hands of the same party right now. Members of Congress don't normally challenge presidents of their own party, and congressional leaders traditionally take their cues from the White House when one of their own inhabits the Oval Office.

However, as veteran Congress-watchers Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein argue in *The Broken Branch*, it's not nearly that simple. The Truman Committee

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famously uncovered waste and fraud in defense spending during FDR's administration. Jimmy Carter presided over a notoriously fractious Democratic Congress, as did Bill Clinton, who was able to pass his first economic plan only because his vice president cast a tiebreaking vote. Republicans helped investigate both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

So why has the current Republican Congress proven to be such a lapdog for President Bush? The same Republicans who spent 140 hours investigating Bill Clinton's Christmas card list can now barely be bothered to investigate even genuinely serious issues like Abu Ghraib, intelligence manipulation before the Iraq war, or the NSA spying affair—all of which have gotten no more than desultory attention. (Though they did manage to bestir themselves to produce a surprisingly harsh indictment of the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina.)

A partisanship verging on tribalism explains some of this, but Mann and Ornstein track the real problem to a deeper, and wonkier, source: the breakdown of "regular order," the combination of rules, traditions, and common folkways that until recently governed the operation of the House and Senate. These traditions started breaking down in the 1980s, declined even more steeply in the post-Gingrich 1990s, and then fell off a cliff following the election of George W. Bush.

Mann and Ornstein provide some useful history here, especially for Bush-era readers who are sometimes inclined to think that political history began in 1994. But it didn't, and they make clear that although firebrand Republicans exaggerated the problems of regular order in the 1980s, there really were problems. After 40 years in the majority, Democrats had grown a little too accustomed to power—and woefully insensitive to the seething anger that their casual exercise of it inspired even in many moderate Republicans.

The most famous example was Democratic Speaker Jim Wright's infamous violation of the "15-minute" rule. By custom, votes in the House last for 15 minutes, after which voting is closed and the tally is announced. But in 1987, still short by one vote on an important budget bill after 15 minutes were up, Wright held the vote open for an extra ten minutes in a frantic effort to find someone to change his vote. Republicans exploded, with no less an eminence than Dick Cheney blasting Wright as "a heavy-handed son of a bitch."

But by today's standards Wright was a piker: He did this only once and only for ten minutes. Recent Republican congresses have made it standard operating procedure. Votes have been held open at least a dozen times in recent years, culminating in an extraordinary three-hour vote at 3 a.m. to pass the Medicare prescription drug bill in 2003. That session featured an unprecedented orgy of arm-twistbers, including pressure so extreme that it caused one Republican member to accuse his leadership of trying to bribe him on the House floor in order to get his vote.

If that were all, though, it would be a mild problem, not a crisis. But it's only the tip of the iceberg, and Mann and Ornstein document a litany of abuses so excruciating that their reaction to the impeachment debacle of 1998 is this: "We didn't think they could sink any lower. We were wrong."

Examples abound. Minority Democrats are routinely given only hours to read the text of thousand-page bills before they're brought up for a vote. Conference committees are stacked exclusively with friendly members. Oversight committees lie dormant and cabinet secretaries treat congressional inquiries with open contempt. Lobbying and pork-barrel spending are at record highs. In the Senate, Republican leaders frustrated with Democratic filibusters have threatened to simply end them by parliamentary fiat. Votes in the House are increasingly held under closed rules that allow no amendments and virtually no debate. (The number of closed rules has increased from 18 percent during the last Democratic Congress to 49 percent in the most recent Congress.) The late 1990s "ethics truce" provides cover for all but the most blatant misconduct. Congress is nowadays held in session for only three days a week, and most members of Congress are barely willing to stick around in Washington even that long. Partly as a result, late evening and early morning "emergency" votes are now routine.

Mann and Ornstein believe that the worst result of this "anything goes" atmosphere has been a calamitous drop in institutional self-respect. Today, they say, "members of the majority party, including the leaders of Congress, see themselves as field lieutenants in the president's army far more than they do as members of a separate and independent branch of government." Because of this, "the uncompromising assertion of executive authority by President Bush and Vice President Cheney was met with a whimper, not a principled fight, by the Republican Congress." Ironically, the very conservatives who argue that lack of respect for society's traditions inevitably leads to weakness and cultural decline, have discovered at least one case where this is undeniably true: right in their own backyard. This in turn has left congressional Republicans too spent to assert their own constitutional prerogatives.

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The key question this raises is why this has happened. Mann and Ornstein admit that modern-day hyperpartisanship can't entirely explain it, but it turns out that one of their case studies provides the most likely answer—though they themselves don't quite seem to realize it. After spending several pages describing the breakdown of regular order in the passage of last year's bankruptcy bill, they note acerbically that one of the bill's problems was "atrocious drafting." But problems with regular order don't explain this. Even if you exclude the minority and ram your agenda through with brute force, there's no reason not to draft a bill decently. So why not do it?

The underlying answer is that no one cared. All political parties have distinctive traits, and one of the clearest in the modern Republican Party is its lack of concern—in fact, its outright contempt—for serious policymaking. You can see it in Congress in the dismantling of the Office of Technology Assessment or the politicization of the Congressional Budget Office. In the White House it's even starker: From the decimation of the CIA to the destruction of FEMA for ideological reasons, George Bush has made it clear that he's uninterested in facts on the ground. It explains why the State Department's experts were shut out of postwar Iraq and why his Social Security privatization plan never made economic sense. It's because today's Republicans think ideas are all that's needed to govern. Policy analysis, the grubby, gritty business of making sure that ideas are implemented in a way that actually works, is ignored, and in Congress, this translates into a disdain for regular order. After all, why waste time with pesky legislative traditions designed to produce sober public policy when you don't really care about policy in the first place?

This explains why the current Republican Congress is uninterested in exerting itself against the current Republican president. It's not just that they're from the same party, it's that they literally have no reason to bother. With no policy debates to divide them, the only time they clash is either when they disagree on fundamental ideas—as they've done on immigration reform, for example—or when there are pure political calculations involved—as with the Dubai port deal. But these occasions are rare, and on virtually every other topic both sides care only about broad themes, not policy details. This explains why Congress is so willing to take its lead from the president and why the president has never vetoed a bill delivered by Congress. It's hardly worth the trouble.

The abandonment of regular order in Congress may be a serious problem, but it's mainly a symptom of the Republican Party's abandonment of interest in producing legislation that actually works. Fix the latter, and the former will take care of itself.

Kevin Drum is a contributing writer for *The Washington Monthly*.

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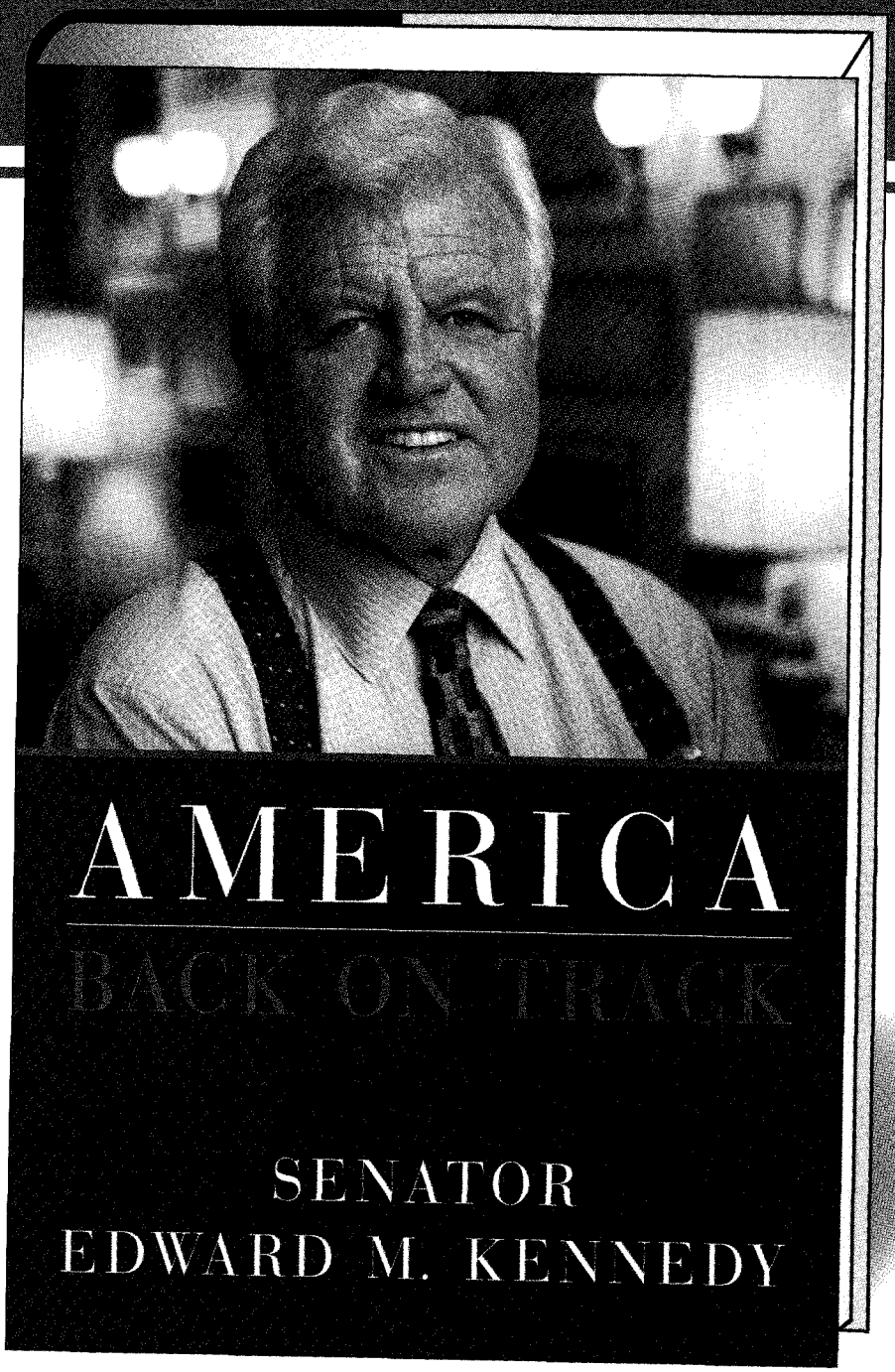

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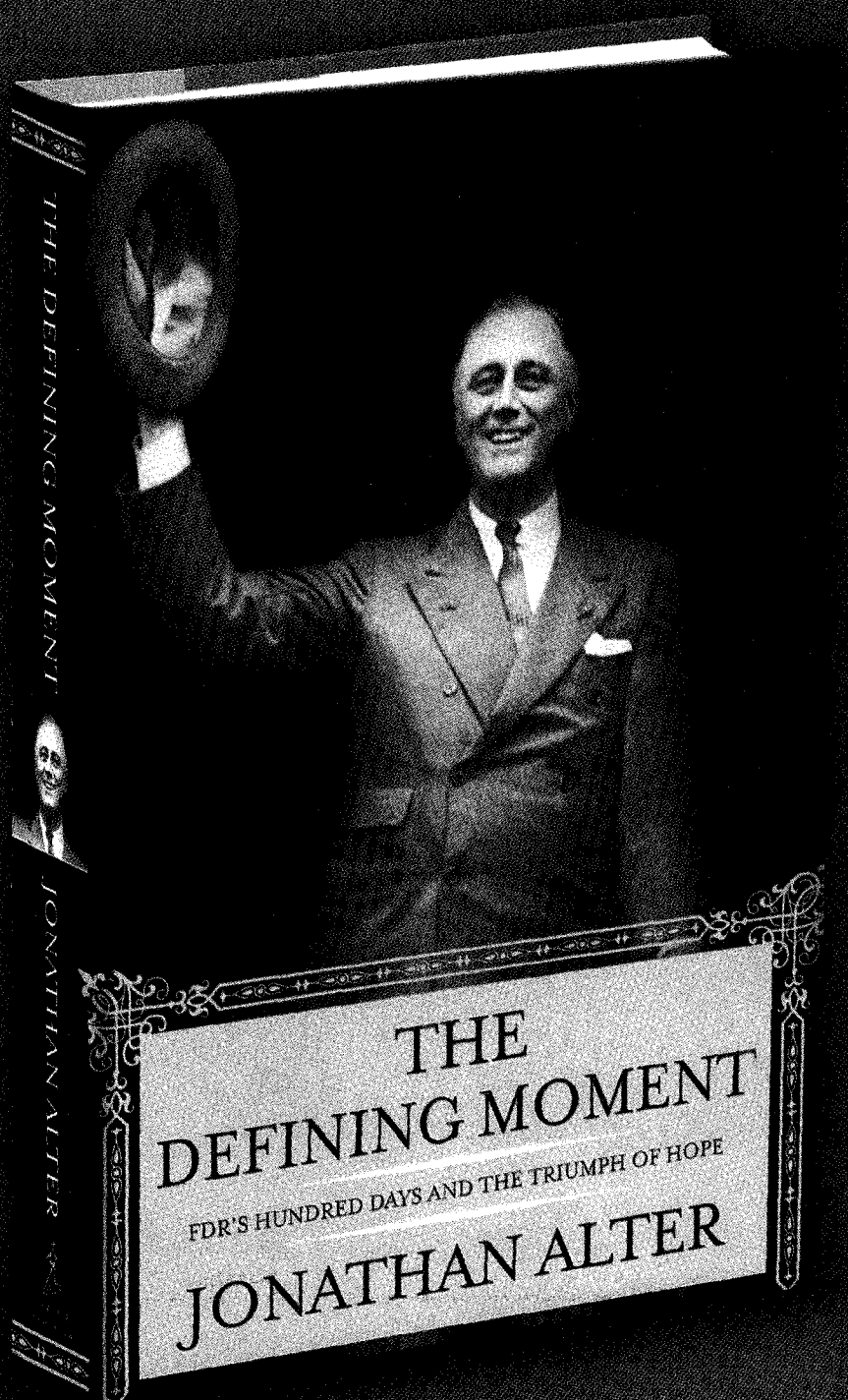

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